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THE GANG

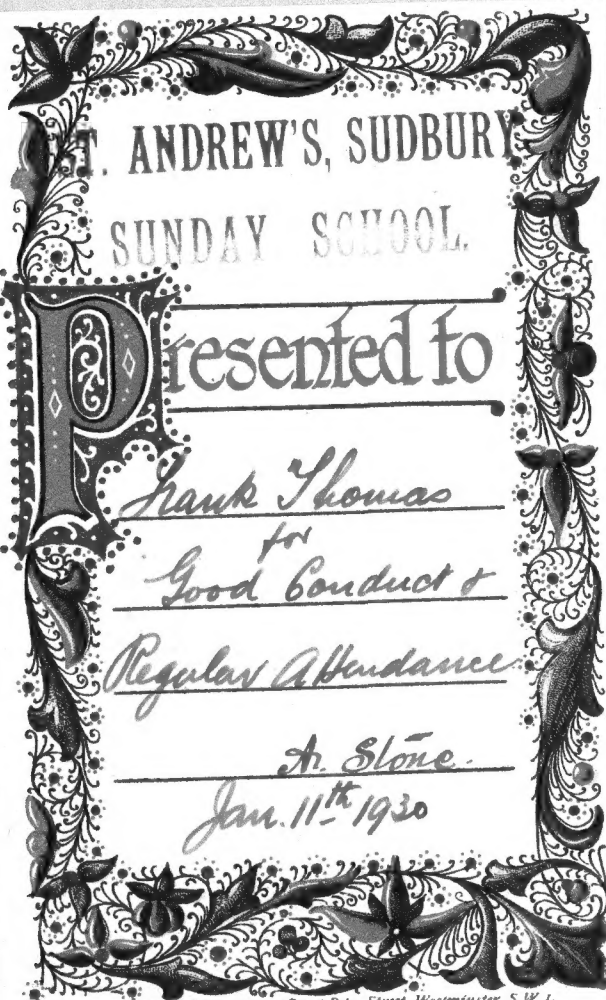
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THE GANG

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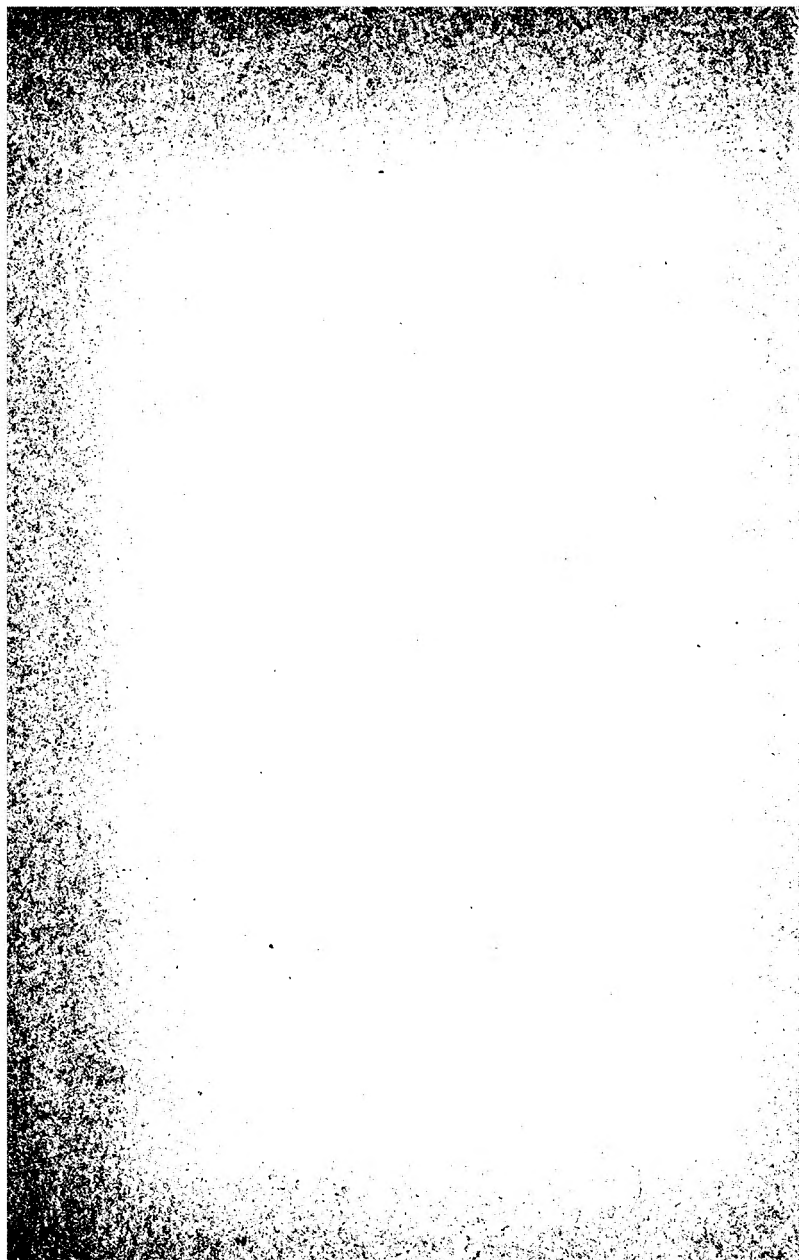
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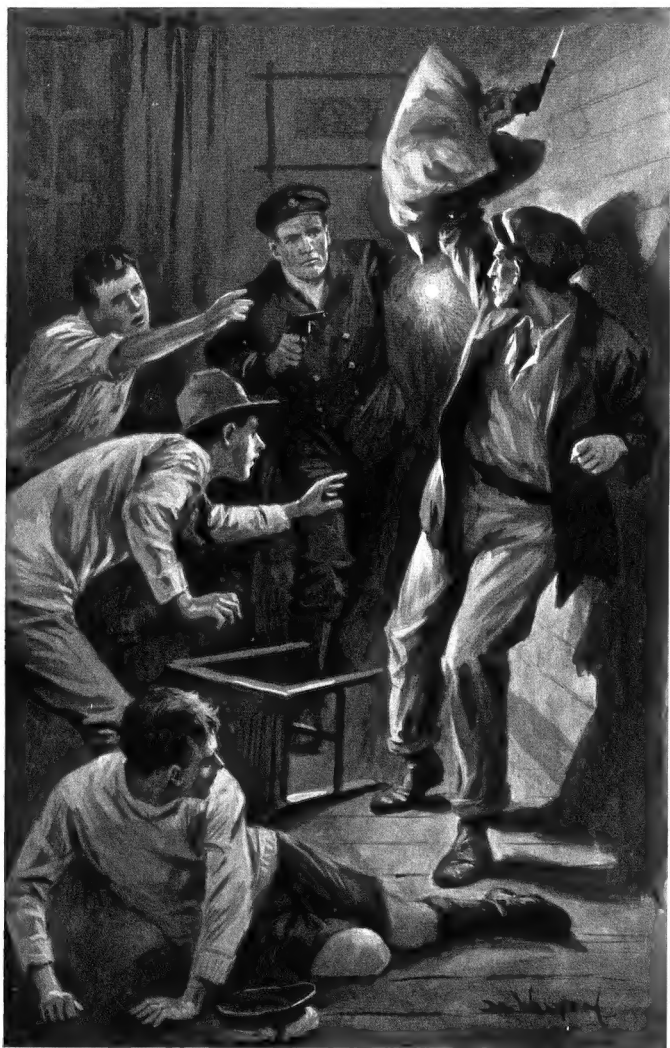
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A CUSHION CAME FLYING THROUGH THE AIR

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Frontispiece



# THREE AGAINST THE GANG

BY

NORMAN BLAKE

Author of "In the Grip of the Barren Lands"

*Illustrated by John de Walton*

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# THREE AGAINST THE GANG

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## CHAPTER I

### The "Scud" loses some Paint

The *Scud* was a thirty-foot sloop, and, in the eyes of Sandy Grant, Pat Stephens, and Dick Hughes she was the prettiest thing that had ever slipped down the river. For the last four months they had thought of her and of the cruise for at least two or three hours a day. The planning had begun in February. Of all months in the school year, that is the least cheerful. The Christmas holidays lie so far behind that they are only a pleasant memory, and summer is still in the distant future. Behind and in front stretches a desert of Latin, algebra, history, and other miseries. And so, to escape from the hideous present, the boys had met once a week, sometimes more often, had pored over maps, drawn up lists of food, talked about fishing tackle, and had forgotten that outside it was fifteen below zero with two feet of snow on the ground.

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More than once Pat had been in trouble at school for filling his books with drawings of the *Scud*. He had portrayed her, with more love than skill, in every imaginable situation—"The *Scud* running before the wind", "The *Scud* coming about", "The *Scud* becalmed". And now here she was, gleaming in her fresh coat of paint, actually drifting down the river with the three of them on board. It seemed too good to be true.

"We're really off," said Dick quietly, as if he were almost afraid to show his excitement. "I thought June would never come."

"And nothing to do for a month," added Sandy, "except sail and fish and swim and cook and kill mosquitoes."

Pat said nothing; he looked dreamily at the water and shore and at the little town of Bloxton just disappearing from view. But perhaps he was the happiest of the three.

The plan was to coast northwards up Lake Huron, and, if they had any luck in weather, to poke round among the islands in the Georgian Bay. That was a familiar paradise to Sandy.

"Wasn't that geography exam a brute?" said Pat, remembering for the hundredth time that these agonies were over. "Why don't they ask interesting questions: 'Draw a map of Lake Huron, showing the probable course of the *Scud*?' Then I might have stood a chance."

"Why worry now, Post?" said Dick.



Pat's surname being Stephens, and his initials P.S., his friends, especially Dick, often called him Post Script or Post, for short.

Sandy was looking intently at the shore. Suddenly he said:

“Not much chance of Burnt Point to-night. The beastly wind is dropping.”

The river was widening, but the banks were sliding past very slowly now. The current was doing more for them than the breeze. Burnt Point was a couple of miles up the lake, and it was already late afternoon.

“But it'll be fresher out on the lake,” said Sandy, who had the tiller. “I think she's doing mighty well with what wind there is.”

“Let's make things shipshape in the cabin,” said Dick to Pat. “I suppose we can trust Sandy to steer. What do you think, Pat? You will be careful, won't you, Sandy? Accidents so often happen from carelessness.”

“Call us if you want help,” added Pat graciously.

“You beggars are only passengers,” growled Sandy. “Don't talk to the crew.”

In a moment Dick and Pat were in the cabin and deep in a discussion as to where this and that could be most conveniently stowed away. To Dick the food was of special interest. Once, two years before, on a canoe trip west of Lake Temagami, he had run short of supplies and for a week had lived on a nourishing but beastly diet of boiled, saltless pike. Hence, it was with evident satisfaction that his eye now dwelt

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on the packages and bags and tins—beans, cocoa, bacon, cheese, and so on. Nothing had been forgotten.

"No danger of starvation this trip," he said to Pat.

"Sometimes, Dick," answered Pat, "you don't seem to have a soul above pork and beans."

Before Dick could retort, something struck the side of the *Scud*. There was a scraping sound, and then they heard Sandy:

"Surely you saw us, didn't you? We were going straight ahead."

Pat and Dick dived out of the cabin. Sandy was standing up and looking over the side at a rowboat with two men in it. The one in the stern was a coarse-looking fellow, with more stomach than chest, and with a cigar in the corner of his mouth. At the oars was a loosely-built lanky man wearing a faded blue sweater. His face was half-hidden by a long moustache and an untidy fringe of beard. He seemed half defiant and half apologetic as he looked up at Sandy. About the man in the stern there was nothing apologetic.

"None of your lip, kid," he said to Sandy. "Youngsters like you shouldn't be out alone. Row ahead, Tom; and don't sit there staring like a blinking owl."

Sandy was not much given to talk at any time and was slow to explode. He said nothing as the boat drew away, but merely studied its occupants with some interest.

"Rather a fat swine, isn't he?" he murmured at last, turning to Pat and Dick. "I wonder who they

are?” He looked sadly down at an ugly scratch on the *Scud's* fresh paint.

“ What happened?” asked Pat and Dick. They did not look or feel calm, and only respect for Sandy's seniority had kept them from bursting into words before now.

“ Oh,” said Sandy, “ I was just keeping the *Scud* in midstream, and these fellows rowed out from that little wharf back there. See it? They're either drunk or don't know how to steer. They came barging right into us and scraped off heaven knows how much of our good paint—and then not even so much as ‘ I'm sorry ’.”

“ I bet father would know who they are,” said Pat. “ I'll ask him about them when we get back.”

Pat's father was a revenue officer.

“ In the meantime,” said Dick, “ where are we getting to?”

“ Not far from the mouth now,” said Sandy.

The light was failing rapidly. Long dark shadows trembled in the water. Objects on the bank could no longer be sharply seen. The breeze began to freshen.

For a few minutes the boys sat in silence and watched the darkening shore line slide past. The only sound was that of the bow cutting through the water.

“ Too late to go up the lake to Burnt Point to-night, don't you think?” said Dick. “ Let's stop somewhere along here and start early in the morning.”

“ All right,” said Sandy. “ What about tying up by the old wharf at the brick-yard?”

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The brick-yard was an old deserted place, full of interesting abandoned machinery. For years the boys had made it a goal for week-end hikes.

"It can't be very far away," said Pat, peering through the darkness. "I'm feeling ready for bed."

"Yes," said Dick, "after we have something to eat."

Sandy edged the *Scud* over towards the right shore. The last gleam of light in the west had almost gone.

"There," said Sandy, and pointed ahead.

In the dim light they could just make out the great chimney in the brick-yard. It was an unmistakable landmark.

A few minutes later the sail was lowered. The *Scud* drifted quietly towards the wharf. Pat and Dick were up in the bow ready to protect the *Scud's* paint. They could hardly see a foot ahead.

"Better use your flash, Dick," said Sandy.

Sandy had spoken just too late. There was a dull heavy bump. Out of the darkness and from above their heads came an unpleasant angry voice:

"Who in thunder are you? Get out of here, if you don't want to be shot."

At last Dick got his flash to work. A ray of light pierced the blackness and showed that the *Scud* had charged into a yacht tied up to the old wharf. Looking down from the deck was the man they had seen a couple of hours before in the stern of the rowboat.

"Put out that infernal light!" he said furiously.

He seemed far angrier than the occasion warranted.

“I’m very sorry,” said Sandy slowly, “but we didn’t think anybody was tied up here. It’s not much used now. We were going to stay the night here ourselves.”

“Well, you’d better change your minds, and be quick about it. There’s room here for us and for nobody else. See?” said the man.

Pat and Dick pushed the *Scud* clear, and she began to drift past the yacht’s side.

“I suppose,” said Pat, looking up into the darkness, “you’ve no objection to us anchoring near the mouth? You haven’t engaged the whole river, have you?”

The man flung a mouthful of oaths at them, and then there was silence.

Who were these fellows? Where was the yacht from? Why so much objection to anybody else tying up to the wharf? These questions were easier to ask than to answer. Sandy was the first to speak:

“Pat,” he said.

“Yes?”

“You didn’t happen to notice, did you, whether we scraped any paint off that filthy yacht?”

Half an hour later the *Scud* was anchored near the mouth of the river. The boys were too full of talk and excitement to sleep at first.

“That’s something to put in your silly diary anyway, Pat,” said Dick.

“Thanks for reminding me,” said Pat, and at once drew out a black-covered notebook and began to scribble.

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Presently he looked up.

"How do you spell mysterious?" he asked.

"There's only one M," said Sandy. "Anybody knows that. Let's go to sleep."

Just after daybreak Sandy suddenly found himself awake. What was it? He slipped out on deck. The air was full of the throbbing sound of an engine. A large grey yacht had just passed. Sandy watched her glide out into the lake and turn south at full speed.

"Well, I hope we shan't see her again," he murmured to himself, as the waves made by the yacht began to slap against the *Scud*. "She's called the *Dart*, eh? Rather a poisonous one. What I'd like to know is: what was she doing at the brick-yard?"

## CHAPTER II

### A Run and a Jump

"Come on! Who's for a swim?" shouted Sandy, into the cabin.

Pat and Dick raised very sleepy-looking heads. They did not seem at all interested in swimming. In fact, at first, they did not remember where they were. But gradually memories of last night—of the yacht and the brick-yard—came back to them. They threw off the blankets and walked out on deck, Sandy told them about seeing the yacht.

"Well, last in washes the breakfast dishes," said Dick.

The three splashes were almost together. The dish-washing went to Pat by about three seconds. Dick had already been appointed chief cook for the trip. But in accepting that job he had made it clearly understood that cooking and washing were two distinct duties, on no account to be confused.

"A cook," he had told them, "is not a general servant. He's a chef."

"We'll see how you get on," said Sandy. "If you

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forget salt in the porridge or burn the bacon, you'll get marooned."

While Dick was kindling a fire of charcoal briquettes in the shipmate stove, the other two pulled up the anchor and hoisted sail. In front of them lay the great blue stretches of Lake Huron, pleasantly rippled by a crisp breeze from the east. The canvas bellied with a snap, and the *Scud* heeled over.

"Off for the Georgian Bay!" cried Sandy, looking with delight at the bubbling wake.

"Meal's ready," announced Dick presently. "I'll bring yours out, Sandy."

Pat and Sandy were too hungry to criticize the cooking, but they allowed themselves a grumble or two when they found that three cups apiece emptied the coffee-pot.

Through the morning the wind steadily freshened. Sandy was in absolute and perfect bliss. He did not say much, but whenever he did speak it was to praise the behaviour of the *Scud*. An occasional drift of spray struck the boys where they sat in the cockpit.

"If the wind stays just like this we'll make a good run to-day," said Sandy.

After dinner Sandy, who had been steering all morning, at last admitted that he was tired. He went to lie down in the cabin, and Pat relieved him at the tiller.

"What do you think, Dick?" said Pat, a couple of hours later. "What about calling Sandy?"

The wind had grown very strong. Great white-



capped waves were rushing at them and past them.

"I don't like the look of that," answered Dick, pointing to windy clouds in the north.

"Let's give him half an hour more. Nothing much can go wrong in that time."

Pat and Dick knew a good bit about canoes, but they had not done much sailing. They had to rely on Sandy, but they did not wish to be nervous and fussy.

"Look here," said Pat, a few minutes afterwards, "we're getting too far out."

They had been so busy watching the waves and the scurrying squalls that they had not noticed how far they had got from shore. Five or six miles of foaming, tumbling water now separated them from land. At that moment Sandy appeared on deck.

"Who was the fellow who talked about being rocked in the cradle of the deep?" he said. "It is about as restful in the cabin as on a corduroy road."

Suddenly he looked at the shore; then at his compass.

"Oh, I see what's happened!" he said. "You've altered her course, Pat. That's why she's bumping so much."

"I didn't know I had," answered Pat. "I kept the wind on my right cheek as you told me to."

"Yes, but the wind's shifted round more to the north. That's why we've got so far out."

"Awfully sorry," said Pat humbly.

"Oh, it's all right. I shouldn't have slept so long. But we'll have to look sharp now. It's going to blow

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good and proper. Give me the tiller. You and Dick get the oilskins, and fish out some grub. Anything'll do. See that the fire's out."

Sandy was clearly worried, and his uneasiness made the other two a bit jumpy.

"We're in for it all right," said Sandy, with a grin when they came on deck again. "The wind's north-west. Better let down the mainsail and trust to the jib. We'll run south."

Sandy brought the *Scud* round into the wind. As the boom swung in, Sandy shouted:

"Now!"

Dick and Pat grabbed the boom and lowered the flapping sail. Round wheeled the *Scud* and raced south, chased by great tumbling waves. No solid water came aboard, but flying spray whipped the boys' faces and splattered their oilskins. The gathering darkness showed up with startling distinctness the white crests of the waves. Sandy, Dick, and Pat munched bacon sandwiches in silence.

"If the jib holds," said Sandy, "we should be all right. It'll steady her. It's a new sail, and I overhauled the wire rigging splices the day before yesterday."

Sandy knew that there was no shoal water in this part of the lake, and there was plenty of sea room.

Half an hour passed. Just above the western horizon was a narrow line of gleaming red sky. Leaping up into this red glow were the tossing waves, black against the brightness. The rest of the sky was covered with dark banks of clouds. Soon the last light of the setting

sun had gone, and the boys could only hear, not see, the waves which seemed always on the point of overwhelming the *Scud*, but yet never did. The darkness seemed to increase the uproar. Sometimes the *Scud* bent forward and, as it were, coasted down a hill of water; at other times she would stand still, quivering like a horse in fear.

"The old girl will bring us through all right," said Sandy proudly, "if we treat her properly."

From time to time he looked at his compass; they were still driving south.

"At any rate," said Pat, "I'm glad we're not up in the Georgian Bay among the reefs. Nothing to hit, down in this part."

Midnight came, one o'clock, two o'clock. They were cold and cramped, but sleep was impossible. No one suggested it or thought of it. All they could do was to keep the *Scud* headed south, to listen to the clamour around them, and to wait for daylight.

For the most part they sat in silence. Anything that was said had to be shouted, so as to be heard above the mad roar of wind and waves.

All at once a great wave lifted the stern high into the air, and then, a moment later, the *Scud* went down, down, as though she were about to bury herself.

"Look out!" shouted Sandy.

As he spoke a solid mass of water broke over their backs. The cockpit was flooded. Water swirled round their legs. The *Scud* staggered as if dazed. Pat rushed off and returned with a pail and a saucepan. With

## Three Against the Gang

desperate haste they started to bail. They must get most of the water out before another wave came aboard.

Slowly the sloop became mistress of herself again, and leaped forward. Nothing was said. There was no need for talk. The boys knew that, if they shipped two or three waves in quick succession, no bailing could save them. They had escaped by the narrowest margin.

They were still bailing when the black sky was divided by a broad jagged flash of lightning. For a tiny fraction of a second the boys saw on all sides of them the mad dance of the waves, and then they were once more wrapped in inky darkness. A roar of thunder followed, and an instant later down came rain, lashing their backs and heads.

"It's as bad for the waves as for us," said Sandy cheerfully. "They'll soon be beaten down."

But it was terrifying enough. Forked lightning broke the darkness again and again, and showed them each other's white faces. Thunder roared and crackled, and the rain fell in sheets.

As they sat huddled together and awed by the power of the storm, another great wave broke over the *Scud*. The sloop rose heavily and slowly; she seemed weighed down and unwieldy; all her lightness and buoyancy had gone. As she tumbled heavily from side to side, there came a specially violent gust and a flash of lightning. They saw the jib torn away as if it were a sheet of paper, and then once more darkness shut down upon them.

"Listen!" shouted Pat, grabbing Sandy's arm.  
"What's that noise?"

Before Sandy could reply a great ribbon of lightning rushed down the sky ahead of them. Then blackness again, but by that momentary, lurid brightness they had seen with terrible distinctness a rocky beach, crowned by a row of dark, wind-bent pines. It was perhaps a hundred yards distant, and lay directly across their path. In an instant Sandy had jammed the tiller across and made the *Scud* run straight before the wind. He hoped to scrape past the east end of the island.

"Get ready to jump!" he yelled.

All this had happened in a second or two. Once more the lightning lit up the scene. The rocks seemed close enough to touch. There was a terrible grating sound. The *Scud* half stopped, and shook from bow to stern. All the loose things on board seemed to fall at once with a clatter which could be heard above even the roaring of the storm. The *Scud* took one leap forward, crashed, and heeled over to the right.

All three boys were at once thrown into the icy water. It was not deep, but the breaking waves knocked them off their feet. All at once Sandy and Pat found themselves among boulders, and then a great thundering wave threw the two of them sprawling on the rocky shore bruised but safe.

"Dick!" shouted Pat, scrambling to his feet.

A half-choked answer came back from the water. A flash of lightning showed Dick floundering and gasping six feet from shore. Seizing Sandy's hand,

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Pat managed to stand against the breakers long enough to catch Dick's uplifted arm. A couple of seconds later all three stood together.

They strained their eyes into the darkness. No sign of the *Scud*. They heard a horrible banging and rending sound, but, when the next flash came, it showed nothing but rocks and tumbling water.

## CHAPTER III

### The Cache

For a few minutes they stood shivering and silent. Indeed, what was there to say? They all felt that it was too big a business for words. They were dazed with the suddenness of the thing. A few moments before they had been on the *Scud*, and now they stood on an unknown shore, and the sloop had vanished as completely as if she had never existed. At last, in a queer strained voice Sandy said slowly:

“The poor old *Scud*!”

As they stood there, dawn began to break. By its pale light they could see the dark grey clouds driving across the sky. The rain was getting the better of the waves. The white caps were almost gone. In a short time there would be only the great slow heaving of the water to show that the night had been a stormy one. If only they had been able to keep the *Scud* out of danger for one more hour, their troubles would have been over.

They were standing near the extreme eastern tip of the island. How large the whole place was they could make only a rough guess—perhaps seven acres. The *Scud* had come within an ace of clearing the rocks. It

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was a matter of feet. But in that knowledge was cold comfort. That they had missed safety by such a narrow margin merely made their loss seem horribly unnecessary.

"If that lightning had come a second or two sooner," said Pat, "we'd have seen the beastly island in time to have skinned past."

"Yes," added Sandy, "and I don't suppose there's another island for miles round here."

They could make a fairly close guess as to the exact spot where the *Scud* had crashed, but there was nothing to show where she was lying. Near them on the rocks lay the lost vessel's boom, and a few feet farther on a water-soaked cotton bag and a small wooden box. These were the only visible reminders that the *Scud* had ever existed.

"Let's see what's in the bag," said Dick, picking it up.

He untied the string, dug his hand in, and held up a fistful of dried apples.

"They won't carry us far," he said sadly. "Think of all that good grub lying down there," he added, looking at the water.

The box contained odds and ends, but nothing to eat—a pair of pliers, two or three feet of wire, a file, and a few nails. Nothing of any value, the shipwrecked crew noted sadly.

The sun was beginning to warm the air. The boys roused themselves. Brooding on their misfortunes would do no good.



"I'll get some birch bark," said Dick, "if you two rake up some wood."

The white trunks of birch trees showed up among the spruce and pine ten feet or so from the water's edge. Dick had soon stripped off enough bark, and a moment or two later the pile of dead branches was crackling cheerily. Rather sadly they put the boom on top of the blaze. It seemed as if they were cremating the *Scud*.

But not for long could they feel sad, cheered by that penetrating heat. After long hours of wet, cold, and sleeplessness they were in bliss. For a time even hunger was forgotten. Their clothes began to steam, and soon sweaters and stockings and shirts were hanging on makeshift clothes-horses.

"Now," said Pat, when their clothes were dry enough to put on again, "we'd better try and find out where we are. Let's have a look at the island."

The eastern end of the island, where they were standing, ran out into a narrow tip about thirty or forty feet long. It was bare of trees and strewn with moderate-sized boulders. The rest of the island looked pretty thickly wooded, and towards the western end the ground was considerably higher.

"May be able to see land from up there," said Dick hopefully.

Each took a small handful of the apples to munch on the way, and they struck off along the north shore. After a few steps they were winding in and out between the pine and spruce in single file. As they went along, they looked eagerly for any sign that the island had

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been occupied; but, for all that they could see, no man might ever have set foot on the place. No blaze on a tree, no clearing for a tent, no charred remains of a fire.

"We're off the beaten track; that's sure," said Pat at last.

Gradually, as they advanced, the ground rose. They were approaching the west end of the island. At the water's edge the rock formed a steep cliff. Finally they came out from the trees, and a few more steps up the slope brought them to an open treeless plateau. At least it was treeless but for one tall pine which stood in the middle. It was wonderful that it had found foothold and nourishment in the thin carpet of earth and moss which overlay the rock.

From the plateau they could pretty well survey the island, and could also look in all directions far over the blue rippling waters of Lake Huron, but of mainland or other islands there was not a trace to be seen.

"I'll try the pine," said Sandy, already clasping the trunk with knees and arms.

It was a rough, slow climb to the first branch twenty feet up. The rest was easy. Dick and Pat watched his ascent with impatient interest. At last he was almost at the top. They saw him crook an arm round the tree, shade his eyes with one hand and look first one way and then another.

"Nothing," he called down. "Just water."

He slithered down and stood beside them. There

remained the south side of the island to examine, but none of them believed that it would reveal anything to help them. They filed down and were soon once more forcing their way through the underbrush. The descent from the plateau was less steep towards the south than towards the north. They reached the water's edge and a few minutes later found that they had to round a little cove.

"Good little harbour, eh?" said Sandy, and, as he said it, they all thought of the *Scud*.

They had not taken more than twenty steps more when Pat, who was in the lead, suddenly stopped with a jerk.

"Look at that!" he said, pointing to the ground.

At his feet lay a cigarette butt, almost beaten into the ground by the night's rain, but still clearly discernible, and beyond mistake a cigarette butt.

"It can hardly have been there all winter," said Dick, "and, if men have been here this year, they may come again."

With minute care they examined all the surrounding ground. On a barely submerged rock a few inches from shore Sandy found a streak of what was undoubtedly green paint.

"Canoe or rowboat," he said. "We're not the only fellows who think this is a good landing-place."

They were now hot on the scent. True, a cigarette end and a little paint were not much help in themselves, but every shred of evidence that men had been on the

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island lessened the sense of isolation and seemed to bring aid nearer.

"There ought to be marks of a camping place or a fire somewhere near," said Dick.

So far they had been looking chiefly at the ground near the water's edge. Now they began to scramble about, hunting for a level cleared spot where a tent might have stood, but they found nothing. Pat was making his way back to where they had found the cigarette when suddenly he stopped.

"Is this a path I'm on, or not?" he called to the others.

They ran up to Pat. The path, if path it were, was certainly not clearly marked, but there was here and there a faint indication that something had been done to make the walking easier. There seemed to be more flat stones there than elsewhere. The ground between the stones had in some places a smooth tramped look.

"We'll soon see," said Dick. "If it's a path, it leads somewhere."

He started running up what they hoped was the path, Pat and Sandy at his heels. He topped the slight slope and came to a small open grassy place. On the far side of it stood a small log shack, almost hidden by trees and bushes.

At first sight the building looked as if it had not been used for years. They tried the door and found it solidly fastened. They walked round the shack, excited and curious. The moss between the logs was falling out; the windows were heavily shuttered with weather-

stained boards. But one thing was out of keeping with the neglected appearance of the shack. Sandy's eyes were the quickest this time.

"That roof's been patched not so long ago," he said.

"Some of the tar-paper's new."

"Well, what would Sherlock Holmes say?" said Pat.

"A man who smokes cigarettes, and who uses a green rowboat or canoe, has recently been here, and doesn't like company."

"Why a man?" said Dick. "Why not men? Well, you're more like Watson than Sherlock Holmes. By now Holmes would have known perfectly that the fellow was six foot two, with a brown moustache, grey eyes, a German accent, a game leg, and that he rolled his own cigarettes."

"I don't care what the beggar looks like," said Pat, "as long as he comes along soon and takes us off."

They hesitated about forcing an entrance. The shack was plainly not meant to be broken into. But the prospect of shelter from wind and rain, and in a measure from mosquitoes, was too tempting. And, what mattered even more, there might be a store of food in the place.

"What do you say? Shall we or not?" asked Sandy.

Hunger decided it. It would be idiotic to starve because of a little scruple. Dick, for one, had no intention of doing so. He was already feeling for a grip on one of the shutters. A few minutes later, it was wrenched off. There was no glass to bar their

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entry, and the three burglars climbed in. The door was closed by a bar which they lifted up.

"Sherlock Holmes will now explain," said Dick, "that the criminal barred the door and then climbed out by the window."

The inside of the shack was almost wholly bare. A rough packing-case in one corner served as a table; a couple of old magazines lay on the floor; a bench made of a board laid on two bits of tree trunk stood against one wall. That was all the furniture. The most cheerful thing was a small stone fireplace, and a pile of firewood. On the floor near the hearth were a couple of tin plates and a frying pan. Of food there was not a sign, and, now that the first excitement of finding the shack was over, food filled their thoughts to the exclusion of everything else.

"Let's go back to where we were wrecked," suggested Sandy. "Some more grub may have been washed up."

Buoyed up by this hope, but feeling very empty, they started off. They headed directly for the east end of the island. All at once a rustling in the bushes at their feet and then a scratching sound stopped them in their tracks.

"There he goes," shouted Dick.

Clambering up a spruce tree was a fat porcupine. As it mounted, it occasionally looked down at them suspiciously.

"Gosh! there's a dinner, if we can only get him," said Dick.

In a moment or two the porcupine was clinging to the slender top of the spruce, which swayed and bent with the creature's weight. The lump of its body looked like a great wasp's nest. How to get it down was not very clear. They had no firearms and no axe.

"If the worst comes to the worst, we can just wait," said Pat, "but he looks a beastly patient animal, and my tummy's aching with emptiness."

"Waiting be hanged! shouted Dick. "You fellows keep him treed. I've got a scheme all right. Back in a minute."

He darted off towards the point where the *Scud* had struck. When he came back a few minutes afterwards he had on his oilskins, cap, and coat.

"Now give me a leg up," he said, with a grin.

Climbing in oilskins is messy and difficult, and Dick's progress was neither swift nor steady. At first the porcupine seemed quite unconcerned, but, as Dick gradually forced his way up, the animal looked down at him from time to time with troubled curiosity, as if he were wondering who was the strange and noisy monster.

"Be careful, Dick," shouted Sandy, "or he'll make you look like a pincushion."

"Don't worry," answered Dick, looking down, "we'll make him look like a stew in a little while."

Dick at last reached a position about a dozen feet below the porcupine. The tree was too slim to allow him to go any higher. With his weight and the porcupine's it was already considerably bent. Dick crooked

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an arm round the spruce, fished out his knife, and began to cut away at the tree. Slowly, as he sawed and whittled, the tree-top sank over more and more. The porcupine showed growing uneasiness and began to back down. This was something Dick had not counted on. He sawed away at the tough green wood, bending the tree over with his free hand at the same time. When the porcupine's tail was a bare three feet from Dick's head, there was a cracking sound.

"Look out below," sang out Dick.

He gave a final slash with his knife, and wrapped his arms round the tree. The tree-top went crashing down through the branches and struck the ground with a heavy thud. Before the animal could waddle away, Sandy and Pat were upon it with sticks and stones. It was a very untidy kill, but they regarded their work with considerable pride. Just as they finished the business, Dick came slithering down.

"I needn't have worn these blooming things after all," he said, looking at the oilskins. "But we've got him anyway."

Half an hour later they were carrying a gory shapeless lump of meat to their fireplace. They had also brought the frying-pan and plates from the shack.

Porcupine can hardly be called a dainty, and this one was ill enough cooked, but to the boys after long hours of strain and fasting, it seemed a royal banquet. Only heroic self-restraint induced them to leave any for the next meal. They had to remind themselves very soberly that only half a porcupine and a bag of



dried apples stood between them and starvation. Nothing had been washed ashore during their absence.

But, if they could eat no more, they could at least sleep. Well fed, warmed by fire and sun, they spread their oilskins under the nearest trees, and for two or three hours forgot everything.

Sandy was the first awake. Pat and Dick found him standing on the shore and staring at the water.

"I was just thinking," he said, "that a few yards away there's enough grub for two or three weeks. What about trying to reach the *Scud* by diving?"

A few feet to the left they could see below the water the ridge of rock on which the sloop had grated before the final crash. Beyond the ridge lay deep water. The *Scud* had struck and then slid back.

Pat, the best swimmer and diver of the three, was soon swimming slowly around about ten or fifteen feet from shore. From time to time he ducked his head under. Presently he shouted out:

"I see her. Remember the spot."

Sandy at once laid a stick on the shore pointing to the place. Pat swam in and warmed himself by the fire. His lips were blue, and his teeth were chattering.

"It's b-b-beastly cold," he stammered, "but it's worth trying. She's lying on her side. Mast pointing this way. Here goes."

Dick and Sandy could do little to help, but they stood ready to jump in if they were needed. Again Pat swam out. They watched his heels kick in the air and disappear.

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"I touched her side," spluttered Pat on bobbing up. "Couldn't get a grip."

Again he came ashore. This time he was clearly discouraged.

"No good," he said at last. "The water's too deep. Even if I could get a grip I couldn't stay down long enough to do anything. The grub'll have to stay in Lake Huron."

"Well," said Sandy, "a storm may smash her up, and wash things ashore. Anyway there's other things besides the *Scud* in the lake."

"What?"

"Fish."

"But we've no tackle."

Sandy went over to the box which had been washed up and took out the wire and the file.

"Might do something with these," he said. He broke off a couple of inches of wire and started to rasp away at it with the file. It was not very long before the wire had a point and something resembling a barb; also a loop for the line to pass through.

"Yes," said Dick, "that's a nice hook and a very nice loop, but where's the line?"

"We might unravel our stockings," said Pat, who was just putting them on again after his swim.

"Wouldn't hold a minnow," retorted Sandy.

"No, but this would," said Pat. "Bootlaces."

In a flash all their laces were firmly tied together. They did not seem much like a silk fishing line, but looked as if they would stand a good tug. Sandy

then broke down and stripped a slim birch for a rod.

"What about bait?" asked Pat.

"Grasshoppers," answered Sandy, "and if that doesn't tempt them we'll try a juicy bit of porcupine. Here goes."

He caught a grasshopper, baited his hook, and threw in near where the *Scud* was. Fifteen minutes passed with no sign of a bite. Sandy worked his way along the shore, stopping at every likely looking spot. Presently he came to the cliff.

"That looks a great place," said Sandy, "but I can't drop this line in from the top."

There was no strip of shore. Sandy and the others moved along the edge of the cliff, looking eagerly for some way of getting down nearer the water. Close to the west end of the island they saw a ledge below them, about two feet wide and eight feet above the lake. The descent to it was rather steep.

"Do you think I'd go in if I slithered down?" asked Sandy. "Could I stop at the ledge or not?"

"It looks beastly narrow," said Dick.

"Here," said Pat, "take the end of the line. We'll pay it out as you go. That'll steady you enough."

"Right you are," answered Sandy, and put a foot over the edge. "It's a good test for the line anyway."

Sandy had kicked his boots off before starting, and his bare feet gave him a fairly good grip on the rough rock. After some anxious moments he reached the ledge. Pat and Dick sent the rod down and lay flat on their stomachs to watch the fishing.

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Sandy had made no mistake in choosing the place. Within five minutes he was playing a bass of decent size. In another five he had slowly hauled the fish up to his rocky perch, to the accompaniment of cheers from Dick and Pat.

So far, so good. The problem now was to get Sandy up again. To climb the steep rock and at the same time to carry a rod and a slippery fish was impossible.

"Ready above there," called out Sandy. He hooked the bass firmly through both gills, and grasped the rod firmly at the end. Then he swung the line, with the precious fish at the end of it, up to Pat and Dick, who pounced upon it like vultures. The rest was easy, and a moment later Sandy was up beside the others.

"We're not going to starve for a while, at any rate," said Dick. "We can hold out till those fellows come back to their shack."

"Let's go up there and turn in now," said Sandy.

The sun was nearly down, and all three were dog-tired. They picked up their few things at the point, and in a few minutes were in the shack. After a fire was started, the place was fairly cheery, but there was little temptation to sit up and talk. Nobody had energy enough to get balsam boughs to sleep on. Of course they had no blankets; the oilskins were their only bedclothes.

"No boards are hard enough to keep me awake," said Dick.

He was already on his back. In a couple of seconds Pat was down too.

"You may say what you like, Dick," he remarked, "but I've felt springier beds. You must have a tough hide."

"It's springy enough here," said Sandy, who was standing in the middle of the floor. "Look!"

He showed them how the floor boards gave under his weight. To emphasize the excellence of his mattress he jumped a couple of feet in the air. He landed with a loud crash and disappeared up to his middle.

The other boys burst out laughing at Sandy's blank look of amazement.

"Where are you going to, Sandy? Down to the cellar?"

Sandy lifted away the broken board and stepped out. He peered down into the opening. Pat and Dick were now standing beside him. A match was struck and showed a pile of wooden boxes, each about two feet square.

Sandy lifted one out, and carried it over to the fire. It was labelled tomato ketchup. The boys looked at one another in surprise and disappointment.

"Whoever owns this place doesn't believe in roughing it," said Sandy. "Well, it will help us to forget Dick's cooking, but we can't live on the stuff. Fish out another box. They can't all be ketchup."

The second box was labelled biscuits.

"They're dainty wafers," said Pat, who had done the lifting, "Must be dog biscuits."

"Whatever they are, we're going to have some," said Dick, picking up the pliers.

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The mere sight of the word biscuits made it impossible to forget what they had all been trying not to remember—that they had had only one meal that day and that had been six hours ago.

The box could not long resist Dick. He used the pliers as if he meant business. There was a whining sound of a nail being drawn, and then a board was wrenched off. The first thing that struck their eyes was straw. When Dick thrust his hand down to get at the biscuits, there was a clink as of glass. He drew out his hand, and in it was a bottle of brandy.

“Great stuff for my diary, even if it’s no use for anything else,” said Pat, and out came the black notebook.

## CHAPTER IV

### A Risky Plan

The boys stared at one another and at the bottle in surprise and disgust. A few moments before they had had high hopes of a good meal, and now they felt cheated and hungrier than ever.

They lifted more boxes out of the hole and opened them. Whatever the inscription outside, the contents were always the same. Nothing but brandy. After opening about a dozen cases the boys gave up. It was no use going on. They were sick of the sight of bottles.

After the first sudden feeling of disappointment had worn off, the boys were struck by the strangeness of the whole business. What were all these cases doing here in an old shack? Who had brought them? Why were the boxes labelled biscuits and ketchup and so on? And, most disturbing question of all, who would come to take the stuff away?

Some of the questions were not hard to answer, but others were puzzling.

"There's one thing clear," said Sandy. "We've struck a bootleggers' cache. Anybody who finds the

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shack is meant to think it's deserted. That's just what we thought at first. They've chosen this island because it's out of the ordinary course of ships."

"Yes, Sandy, but why use the island at all?" asked Pat. "Why don't they run the stuff straight across from Canada to the States? Why dump it here?"

This stumped Sandy for a while. At last he hit upon a likely enough reason.

"Probably they do the whole job by night. They bring it as far as this and then nip back to Canada before daybreak. Then, perhaps, another lot of fellows slide over from the American side, and take it off by night. This is half-way house. What do you think? I'm only guessing."

"Maybe you're right," said Dick slowly. "And if that's the way of it, we'll have to look out. Half-way house is rather an unhealthy spot for outsiders like us. We may have visitors any night, and then what? Suppose they find us in this shack? I don't see them offering us a free voyage home."

"How'll they know we've found the cache?" said Pat.

"That's how," said Dick, pointing to the broken floor board. "We've smashed some of the boxboards too. What had we better do?"

Plainly, the first thing was to close up the boxes as neatly as possible and put them back in the cellar. They worked as swiftly now to nail up the boxes as, a little while before, they had done to open them. At any moment, they felt, the door might be kicked open.



Their ears were strained to catch the sound of footsteps or voices.

At last all the boxes were stowed away. The break in the floor was concealed as well as possible. They drew freer breaths, and looked at one another more calmly.

"What are we going to do to-night?" asked Sandy. "Clear out at once, or sleep here? Whatever else happens, we must not be caught by these beggars."

They talked the matter over, and, while they did so, they instinctively lowered their voices. The upshot of the discussion was that they decided to stay in the shack for that night, but take turns on guard. The men could hardly approach without being heard, and there would probably be time to escape unobserved. The most powerful argument in favour of staying where they were was their absolute fatigue.

Sandy took first turn on guard, and was followed by Pat. When Dick woke the others up, he had a breakfast of fish ready.

Sunshine, a good meal, and a dip in the lake, put a much healthier look on their situation. But, for all that, the shack had ceased to be a cosy cheerful place. They felt more secure in the open. The walls of the shack had at first been welcomed as a protection against cold and wet. But they did not think of that now. They only thought that from inside the shack they could not see anybody approaching. Better face wind and rain than a gang of unscrupulous law-breakers.

"Let's move up to the cliff," suggested Sandy, as

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they sat talking over the situation. "We shan't be seen up there. We can see boats in the daytime, and hear them at night."

"And it's near the fishing place," added Dick.

It was a relief to them all to have something to do. Carefully they removed, as far as they could, every trace of their occupation of the shack. But nothing could efface the tell-tale broken board and the splintered boxes. They thought at one time of removing the boxes.

"But," said Sandy, "there's the floor. We can't do anything about that, and that tells them, as clearly as the boxes, that somebody's been here."

When they reached the cliff, they set to work to make a shelter. They planted two crotched sticks in the ground about six feet apart. On these they laid a crossbar. Two oilskins buttoned together and draped over the bar made a sort of half tent. The open side was blocked with branches slanting from the crossbar to the ground. A thick layer of balsam boughs was spread inside the tent and on top of that the third oilskin. It was a tiny tent but better than nothing. Their main want was blankets, and they could only hope for warm nights and dry weather.

A stone fireplace was the next thing to make. It had to be near the tent to give warmth at night, and it had to be built so as to hide the flames as far as possible. It was in the shape of a U, the closed end towards the shack. The shack was just visible from the tent through a gap in the trees.

"The fireplace is all right," said Dick, when the job was finished," but what are we going to cook with? What about the frying pan?"

"Might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," said Pat. "The floor'll tell them somebody's been there. We can't help that. They won't get any more excited about the pan. Anyway they'll never think that we're still on the island."

Off he ran to the shack, and returned presently, not only with the pan, but with the plates also.

"Might as well go the whole hog," he said, "we may not have much to eat, but we'll eat it in style."

The day was wearing on, and there remained two very important things to do—to get a pile of firewood and to catch some fish. To gather wood was easy enough, even without an axe, but the fishing was an uncertain and ticklish business. If the bass should refuse to bite, starvation was not very far off, and if the bootlaces should break, their tackle was gone. They had ransacked every corner of the shack for string or rope without success.

"As long as they go on biting, you go on hauling them in," was the advice Pat and Dick gave to Sandy, as they helped him down to the ledge.

He caught three, and then his luck went. Not another bite. It was now almost dark.

"I'll take the first watch again," said Sandy, after they had finished a meal.

The others crept into the little shelter, and Sandy lay watching the fire, and thinking of all the queer

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things which had happened and the queerer things which might happen. His thoughts were far from happy. He was the oldest of the three and blamed himself for the wreck. Why had he slept so long that afternoon on the *Scud*? He had known that Pat and Dick weren't used to sailing. And here they were now, stuck on this wretched island, with a very good chance of starving to death or of being put out of the way by bootleggers. The only comfort Sandy could find was that their people would not worry for a while, for, even if all had gone well, there would have been few chances of writing letters home.

Gradually Sandy's senses became dulled. The stillness of the night, the warmth of the fire, and his own fatigue all made him drowsy. Once or twice he fought off his sleepiness. He stood up and walked about. Then he was startled to find that he had fallen asleep leaning against the big tree. In vain he reproached himself; his eyes would not stay open. His will-power was benumbed; his body was like lead.

"I'll slip down and bathe my face," he said to himself.

But before he had gone twenty steps, he had no need to bathe his face. All thought of sleep had vanished. Every sense had suddenly been pricked awake. He had heard on the still night air a faint but unmistakable throb, the throb of a gasoline engine.

Every moment the sound grew louder. It dinned itself into his ears. The boat was swiftly drawing near the island. As Sandy stood there, bewildered, a shaft

of white light suddenly divided the darkness. It came from about a couple of hundred yards out on the water, and moved along the shore to the landing-place. The throbbing of the engine stopped.

At last Sandy roused himself. What a fool he was to stand there, a target for the searchlight! Then, too, Dick and Pat might, at any moment, wake up, find he had gone, and shout to him. As he turned to go up the slope again, he heard anchor chains rattle. He raced up to the shelter and shook Pat and Dick awake.

"They've come," he whispered excitedly. "Don't make a noise."

"Who've come? What are you talking about?" murmured Dick in a sleepy voice.

Then all at once the memory of where they were came back to him.

"What'll we do?" he asked.

"I dunno," said Sandy. "Put out the fire first."

That was done in an instant. Then they held a whispered consultation, and decided to do nothing more for the moment; to listen and be guided by the turn of events.

They could now hear the creak of oars and the low murmur of voices. The rowboat could be seen—a moving black shape—in the white path made by the searchlight. Presently a grating sound told them that the rowboat had landed. The voices grew louder. The men were approaching the shack. Suddenly the beam of a flashlight shone out beside the shack, and they could dimly make out the figures of five men.

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One of the men pulled off a shutter and scrambled into the shack. When would the broken floor be discovered? From inside the shack came a muffled thud.

“He’s gone down the hole,” whispered Dick.

The men waiting for the shack door to be opened grew impatient.

“What’s keeping you?” cried one of them. “Get a move on.”

At last the door was opened, and all the men went in. Then there was a sound of excited talk, but the boys could not catch the words.

“Look here!” said Pat suddenly. “Let’s grab the rowboat.”

## CHAPTER V

### Two Up and One Down

Pat was always like that; harum-scarum, ready to try anything as soon as he thought of it.

For a moment even the more cautious Sandy seemed to be in favour of the scheme. Then he shook his head.

"No good, Post. We've no grub to take with us. We don't know how far away the mainland is; and these fellows might nab us. Safer to stay here."

But Pat was in love with his plan.

"Why not try?" he urged. "We've no grub here, if it comes to that. I'd as soon starve in a boat as on an island. Come on: let's have a shot at it."

Sandy wavered and seemed about to give in. But the chance was gone. At that moment the men came out of the shack. Their voices could now be heard distinctly.

"Here, Tom, you and Jim row off and tell Bill what's up. Make the boat jump too."

Bill was evidently the leader of the gang. The boys watched the rowboat moving towards the launch along the silvery path of light. Then, from out on the water, came confused snatches of talk, and finally a harsh

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voice sounded clearly above the rest. They guessed it was Bill's. When they heard it, the boys looked at one another in surprise. The voice had stirred something in their memories.

"It must be Mickie and his gang," said the voice. "I'd like to get them. We owe them something."

At once the boat was quickly rowed in.

"Here, Tom," said the same harsh voice. "You stay in the boat, a few feet out. If anybody's here, they're not going to get off that way. You've got a rifle. If anyone tries to get the boat, pump him full of lead."

Then Jim and Bill came up to the shack and went in. They soon came out again.

"Nothing for it but to search the place," said Bill. "They may be still hangin' round. Why should they leave the stuff? We must have surprised them. Give the signal, Jim."

Jim went down to the shore and shouted something or other to the launch. What was to be the next move was not clear. The anchor was hauled up, and the engine started. Slowly the searchlight began to move along the shoreline.

"They're going to circle the island," said Sandy. "They're looking for a boat."

"Well, they won't find the *Scud*," said Dick.

They knew that as long as they did not expose themselves at the water's edge they were safe from the light. There was nothing to do but lie low and wait. In a few moments the launch had turned the eastern tip of the



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island, and in a few minutes more she was back at her old anchorage.

"Drew a blank that time, old bird, didn't you?" murmured Dick to himself.

Bill's voice, harsh and domineering, was heard again.

"They've found nothing. Now we've got to look on land. Spread out and cover the ground from here to that end first. You needn't waste any politeness on anybody you find."

The boys looked at one another, stiff with excitement. Which was "that end"? After a moment's uncertainty they saw the flashlights move off slowly towards the east.

"Come on," said Sandy. "We're safe for the moment, but only for the moment. They'll do this end next."

He sprang at the tent and pulled it down. While he bundled up the oilskins and hid them under stones, Pat and Dick destroyed the fireplace and scattered the balsam boughs. The frying-pan and the plates were swiftly hidden.

"Now, where are we going to hide?" asked Sandy.

"The fishing-ledge," said Dick.

"No," said Sandy. "Up in the spruce trees, and right beside the shack too. They won't think of looking there."

"What if there's a guard?" said Dick.

"Then we'll have to go somewhere else."

Pat had said nothing, but he seemed to accept

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Sandy's plan. Slowly and cautiously they crept down the slope. Ahead of them they could hear the receding footsteps of the men tramping through the underbrush. Near the shack there was not a sound.

"Now," said Sandy in a whisper, "remember, if one's caught, the others must try and rescue him somehow. If you're nabbed, pretend you're the only one. Pick your trees: not too close together; and climb quietly."

They scattered. There was some scratching and rustling; a few twigs snapped, and then there was silence. It was none too soon. Five minutes later back came the men, stumbling and swearing. Dick and Sandy pressed themselves close to the trunks of their trees as the men passed beneath them.

Pat was on the ground. He had not given up his scheme of somehow getting the rowboat. When the others had climbed, he had slipped quietly down towards the landing-place. He stopped about halfway and lay flat beneath a bush. When the men had passed—one of them within five feet of Pat's head—he crawled down to the shore.

There was the rowboat, fifteen or twenty feet out, very black and distinct in the glare of the searchlight. A fellow was sitting on one of the middle seats, hunched up and lazily smoking. How was he to be got out of the boat, and how was Pat to get in? There was no time to lose. The searchers must have reached the west end of the island by this time, and would soon be back at the shack.

Pat felt round near his feet. Presently his hand closed on a stone about the size of a snowball. He weighed it critically in his hand.

"Should do nicely," he said to himself, and picked up a second of the same size.

Pat moved quietly away from the water to the bush he had hidden under before. Here he waited. Soon he heard the men crashing through the bushes on their way to the shack.

"Get the stuff on board," Bill was saying. "We should have been out of this half an hour ago."

Pat stood up straight, took a good aim at the nearest flashlight, and let fly. He heard the stone thud into the man's body.

"Help! I'm shot!" shouted the fellow. Another man ran to him. Somebody else let off a rifle or revolver. All was shouting and confusion, and wild waving of flashlights. Pat had crouched down behind the bush and was looking at the man in the rowboat. He straightened up, grabbed the oars, and rowed a stroke towards the shore.

"Want me? What's up?" he shouted.

But Pat was the only one who heard him. There was no answer, and the man rowed no nearer. His orders had been to stay where he was; and it was plain that, unless those orders were changed, he meant to stay there. Pat's plan had failed.

Just for an instant he thought of himself calling out to the man and ordering him in. But even to Pat this seemed too risky.

"I guess there's nothing for it," he muttered, "but to try the other game."

The excited talk was still going on behind him, as Pat crept down to the water's edge, twenty yards to the right of the landing-place. Swiftly he slipped off shoes and stockings, waded quietly into the water, and began to swim. The boat was gently rocking in the path of light. The man was looking towards the shore, but he was no longer alert. He had evidently decided that the row on shore was no concern of his.

Pat swam straight out until he was beyond the rowboat and then turned to the left. He made as little noise as possible, but he expected that at any moment the man would hear the ripples. But the fellow was busy knocking out his pipe on the gunwale. Pat heard the faint hiss of the ashes in the water. Suddenly he saw the man stand erect, and for a moment thought that the game was up. But Tom only stood there fumbling in his trouser pockets for his tobacco. Pat took two swift strokes, grasped the gunwale, and with all his might rocked the boat. At the same time he sent out a wild and eerie cry.

The man's hands flew out of his pockets: his arms waved madly in the air as he tried to regain his balance, and at the same time he tried to look over his shoulder. Then, still clawing at the air and uttering a startled shout, he fell with a great smacking splash. He went below the surface, came up gurgling and bewildered, and made straight for shore. He had no intention of facing the strange creature which had assailed him.

From their perches in the spruce trees Dick and Sandy had listened to all the commotion—the shoutings, the shot, the cry of the man out on the water. What it all meant they had not the slightest idea. They, of course, took it for granted that Pat was clinging to a tree-trunk as they were. Presently the man from the rowboat came floundering to shore.

“Bill!” he shouted in an excited panicky voice.

Bill and a couple of others ran down to the shore, and, when he saw who it was, he burst out:

“What the blazes are you doing here? Didn’t I tell you to stay in the boat? How did you get wet, and where’s the boat?”

Under the fire of angry questions Tom stood speechless and confused. At last he stammered:

“Well, you see—I—the boat—the thing of it is I was thrown out.”

“Thrown out!” said Bill scornfully. “Who threw you out?”

“It was a—I was just sitting there.—No I was standing—and something came alongside with an awful queer noise and near upset it.”

“You’re a proper sailor, you are,” said one of the other men. “You should play on the shore with a pail and shovel.”

“Hold your tongue, Jim,” said Bill. “Come on, we’ve got to find the boat and get the stuff on board.”

He called to the yacht.

“Boat adrift. Find it with the light.”

As soon as the man had fallen into the water, Pat

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had begun to shove the boat out of the path of the light. Once he had reached the sheltering darkness he clambered in and grabbed the oars. His plan was to hide the boat somewhere until the gang had cleared out. He headed for the west end of the island. He knew only too well that his time was short, and a few precious moments had already gone. Just as his oars dipped for the first stroke, he heard the voices on shore. Tom had landed. If only the men would go on talking instead of acting he might get round the end and pull the boat up somewhere under the trees. But, though haste was all important, yet he had to try and row quietly. The boat was large and heavily built. To Pat, though he was putting every ounce of muscle into his tugging, the wretched thing seemed to move about as swiftly as a bicycle in gravel. It had no glide or jump. He looked over his shoulder, and found that he was heading in too far. The point of the island seemed terribly far away.

Then he heard Bill shout to the yacht. The next instant the long line of light began to move westward. As he tugged at the oars, Pat watched the light sliding after him over the dark water. The noiseless stealing progress of the thing was terrifying. The beastly boat seemed to be standing still, though Pat's arms were numb with pulling. Everything seemed leaden except that stealthy light.

Pat tried the only plan he could think of. He turned the bow straight out from land. If he could not double the point of the island, the next best thing was to get



A-L WAS SHOUTING AND CONFUSION





out into the open. But he was too late. He had barely taken a stroke in the new direction when his eyes were blinded with the glare of the searchlight full on him. From somewhere came shouts of:

"There he is! Let him have it!"

A bullet whistled over his head and plunked into the water a few feet beyond. A second rifle crack rang out, and Pat fell, limp and helpless, into the water.

"That got him!" shouted one of the men.

For a moment or two longer the searchlight played on the empty boat. A man on the yacht lowered a second boat, rowed over to the empty one, and brought both to the landing-place.

Now the men began to carry the boxes from the shack to the boats. When a boat was filled it was rowed out to the yacht, and then brought back for another load.

Sandy and Dick watched the men passing and repassing beneath them. They did not yet understand all that had happened, but that Pat had been shot seemed to them only too likely. Until the coast was clear, however, they could do nothing. With heavy hearts they clung to their trees and waited for a chance to slip down.

At last the men stopped carrying boxes. The final loads were rowed out, and the empty boats came back for the men. The boys could not see the landing-place very clearly, but sounds came up to them distinctly enough. Presently they heard Bill's voice.

"Tom," he said, "you'd better stay and keep an

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eye on things. Other people may be hanging around. Take a rifle and ammunition. I'll send grub ashore for you now. A new lot of stuff will be here in a few days, but, if you want to die in your bed, you drink nothing but the lake. You can bathe and look at the scenery."

Sandy and Dick could not catch Tom's mumbled reply, but it did not sound enthusiastic. The two boats rowed away. Tom was left muttering on the shore. A few minutes later one of the boats returned.

"Here's the grub, Tom."

"All right," said Tom sulkily, "why didn't you bring me a bottle?"

The man laughed and rowed away. Tom picked up his things and slowly climbed the path towards the shack. The engine on the yacht was throbbing. The anchor was hoisted; the steady churning of the screw began. Tom slammed the door of the shack.

## CHAPTER VI

# Hide and Seek

A moment after Tom had banged the door a squirrel began to scold in one of the spruce trees close by. It was answered from another tree a dozen yards away. Then very cautiously the two boys slid down to earth, and tiptoed away from the shack and towards the lake.

"Where's Pat?" was Sandy's first question. There was a ring of anxiety in his voice.

"I don't know," answered Dick. "I thought he climbed a tree when we did."

"It must have been him they were shooting at," said Sandy. "Who else could it be?"

For a few moments neither said anything more. The minds of both were full of the same thought—the thought of Pat lying dead at the bottom of the lake. Just a few days before they had been starting out on their holiday cruise. How suddenly things had happened! It all seemed ridiculously unreal—Pat gone and they themselves hiding helplessly on an unknown island, with next to no food. It was all a dream—a horrible dream.

Sandy pulled himself together.

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"They may not have hit him, although one of the brutes yelled out something about 'got him'. He may have swum ashore. Let's go along."

Slowly they moved along the water's edge, looking everywhere as they went. Of course they did not dare to shout, though they longed to do so. But they reminded themselves that, if Pat had come ashore, shouting would not do him much good. If he were on land, they would soon find him.

They had gone not more than twenty steps along the narrow strip of shore, at one moment peering out over the dark water and at another glancing with sinking hopes at every bush and tree, when Dick slightly stumbled. He stooped and uttered a low exclamation. Then he picked something up and handed it to Sandy. It was a pair of boots.

"They're Pat's all right," said Sandy. "Rubber soles and no laces."

The discovery of the boots showed that Pat had taken to the water, but it was no comfort to know that. If no harm had come to Pat, why had he not returned for his boots?

They were staring dumbly at the boots when the silence was suddenly broken by a loud clatter behind them. They turned and started forwards. Dick was on the point of calling out, "Is that you, Pat?" when Sandy's hand was firmly clapped over his mouth.

"Down!" he whispered.

They were none too soon.

It was Tom. They saw him in the dim light come

stumbling down to the landing-place, swearing to himself and swinging a tin pail. It was that which had clattered on the rocks. Tom had evidently come down for water. They watched him wade in a few feet and fill his pail.

"Drink the lake. That was what Bill said," he muttered in an injured tone. "We'll see about that, and them with all those cases of good stuff. Wait till I get a chance."

He floundered ashore, and, still complaining, disappeared up the rough path. Once more they heard the door slam.

"That was a close shave," said Sandy. "The sooner we get out of here the better. It doesn't look as if we could help poor old Pat by hanging round the shore. Let's go back to our old camp."

A few minutes later they were up on the high ground. The oilskins were soon found, and also their scanty store of food. After a few mouthfuls of cold fish they stretched themselves on their oilskins, too tired to make any plans for the future. For the moment they were safe; they could do no more. The morrow would have to look after itself.

But, though tired, they could not sleep. For long they lay silent, looking up at the quiet starry sky. Suddenly there was a half-muffled sound beside Sandy. It was Dick, sobbing.

"I can't help it, Sandy," he said jerkily. "It's poor old Post."

Sandy, in truth, was not very far from being in

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the same state himself, but he knew that he must not show it.

"Look here, Dick," he said bluntly, "blubbing won't do any good. We've got to escape, and we've got to get the brutes who shot Pat, but sleep's the only thing now."

"I know—you're right, Sandy; I'll try, but——"

Nothing more was said, but sleep did not come soon to either of them. When at last they did doze off, they tossed and moved uneasily, and dreamed of rifle shots, of the throbbing of the yacht's engine, of clinging to tree-tops, and of Bill's harsh voice.

The sunlight was hot upon them when they woke up, only half rested and oppressed with a numbed unhappy feeling. Their first glance was instinctively towards the shack. Smoke was rising from the chimney, and the sight of it reminded them that they were hungry.

"We've got the beggar's frying-pan anyway," said Dick. "Now for something to put in it. Better catch a fish while the coast's clear."

He caught a couple of grasshoppers, and Sandy helped to lower him to the fishing-ledge. While Dick fished, Sandy kept an anxious eye on the shack. For a while Dick had no luck. Then Sandy saw him stiffen with excitement and jerk the rod. The line was taut.

"It's a big one," whispered Dick eagerly. But all at once his tone changed, and he murmured to Sandy in disgust.

"I've caught bottom."

This way and that he made the line saw through the water; he left it slack, he jerked; he pulled slowly and steadily. It was all no good. Dick had hooked Canada fairly and squarely.

"Hurry up," said Sandy. "The old fellow will be coming out soon."

Dick lowered the rod, and drew it in until it and the bootlaces were in the same line. Then he began to pull. The bootlaces tightened, stretched, and then snapped. The rod was free, the line was gone, irrecoverably lost.

Dick turned a dismayed face up towards Sandy.

"I've spilt the beans now," he said. "No more fish."

"Never mind," said Sandy, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "You'd better come up."

It was none too easy to scramble up, but Dick managed it. They slipped dejectedly back to the camp, Dick heaping reproaches upon himself for his clumsiness.

"Oh, shut up!" said Sandy at last. "It might have happened to anyone. Let's eat."

They rebuilt the stone fireplace and over a tiny fire cooked one of the fish caught the day before.

Between mouthfuls they talked of plans. The first essential was for them to remain undiscovered. From where they were they could keep a good watch on Tom's movements. In the more thickly wooded and lower parts of the island they would probably be in

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more danger. They decided to stick to the cliff and to spy on Tom. They could make no plans for escaping from the island. All they could do was to be ready to snatch at a chance if one should come.

"Another yacht will be in to-night—you heard the man tell Tom that, just before they left," said Dick. "Whatever we do, we mustn't let ourselves be seen before then. We might manage Tom alone, but we'd stand no chance with a gang."

Sandy nodded.

"Lie low's the game."

"Yes, that's all right," answered Dick, "but we're going to starve mighty soon unless something happens. We've got about enough grub left for two decent meals, and then what?"

That was not an easy or a pleasant question to answer, and Sandy said nothing. They lay in silence looking at the shack. All at once Dick gave himself a shake.

"By gosh, it makes me mad," he said, "to think of all the foodstuff down there in the shack. We'll get some of that old fellow's grub by hook or crook. We've just got to."

"You mean raid the place when he's not there?"

Dick nodded.

In imagination they saw shelves in the shack loaded with tins of pork and beans and sides of bacon.

As they lay there, great black-purple clouds began to pile up in the west, and to move steadily towards



the island. A rising wind made ominous music in the pine trees.

"It just needed that," said Sandy, with a wry smile as the first large drops began to fall. "That puts the lid on it."

In ten minutes the rain was lashing down. They sat huddled together under the big tree, with Pat's oilskin over their heads and shoulders.

"The old fellow won't feel like strolling about in this downpour," said Dick. "He'll be hugging the fire, you bet."

The sight of the smoke from the shack chimney and the thought of a glowing fire did not make them more resigned. They munched two or three bits of dried apple, and for an hour not much was said. All at once Dick came to life.

"Look here, Sandy, I'm going to take a chance. If we go on playing safe to the end we'll starve, and pretty soon too, I think."

He tapped the region of his stomach with a melancholy look.

"It can't go on raining for ever," he went on. "When it stops, the beggar will come out. He may not care about bathing or brushing his teeth, but he'll need water."

"Well?" said Sandy.

"Don't you see? While it's still raining I can slip down, climb a tree near the shack, and be ready to nip in as soon as he's out of sight."

"Right you are," said Sandy. "We'll try it."

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"Not we," answered Dick. "It's a job for one. No use two of us running the risk. If I'm nabbed you may be able to help me. What's the use of us both being caught?"

"Yes," said Sandy reluctantly. "I suppose you're right, but be careful. Remember Pat."

Dick had already slipped off his oilskins.

"I've climbed once in those blooming things, and that's enough," he said.

A moment later he was gone. Sandy watched him crawl down the slope. Dick took advantage of every tree, bush, and rock on his route, and kept a watchful eye on the door. When he was about twenty-five yards from the shack the door suddenly opened, and Tom's lanky figure appeared on the threshold. Dick flopped behind a juniper bush and froze.

The man took a leisurely critical look at the clouds and rain, and then, with an exclamation of disgust, he went in and kicked the door shut. Three minutes more, and Dick was safely hidden thirty feet up a spruce, the branches of which almost reached over the roof of the house. He gave a cheerful wave to Sandy and settled down to wait.

Slowly the day dragged on. At last the rain slackened, and a patch of blue sky showed. In a quarter of an hour the grass was glittering in the sunshine. Both Sandy and Dick grew tense. Surely Tom would come out now.

Their guess was correct. Soon afterwards the door opened, and the man came out, pail in hand. With an

awkward rolling gait he moved off down the path towards the landing-place. No sooner had the bushes closed behind him than Dick slithered down the tree and darted into the shack. Sandy glanced anxiously from the door to the landing-place. Between the trees he could just see Tom wading out to fill his pail, and then turn towards the shore. He lost sight of him, and waited, with hammering heart, for his reappearance beside the shack. What on earth was keeping Dick? In a moment or two he would be caught.

After what seemed an age Dick rushed out and started to race up the hill. When he had all but reached the top, his foot caught in a root, and down he went with a clattering noise. At the same instant Tom came into view within a few yards of the shack. He heard the sound and looked up. A squirrel's chatter from Sandy warned Dick not to move. Luckily he had fallen in a little hollow; and, as long as he lay there, he was invisible from below. But he could not see Tom's movements. The question was whether Tom would climb the hill to investigate.

After staring up the slope for a moment or two in a bewildered fashion, Tom moved slowly on, and entered the shack. Five seconds after the door had closed Dick was at Sandy's side.

"That blinking root!" was his first remark. "It nearly fixed me."

"Good for you, Dick," said Sandy. "What did you get?"

"Beans," said Dick. "There was a side of bacon,

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but I didn't dare take it. He may not miss the beans. It isn't much, but it's the large size tin—see, three or four meals anyway. We may get another chance.”

Not till after dark did they venture to light a fire, and then only a tiny one. But if it was not large enough to cheer the camp, it served to warm the beans. They ate about a third of the tin, and then forced themselves to call a halt only by using the sternest self-control.

“I don't feel half-full yet,” said Dick.

“No, and you're not going to,” answered Sandy.

As soon as the fire had cooked their slim meal, it was quenched. If the second yacht should come this night, they would be safer in darkness. The smallest spark might betray them.

They lay waiting for the sound of the engine's throb with some excitement, but with no eagerness. The coming of the yacht with its load of brandy would not, so far as they could see, help them to escape. All it meant for them was that they must deny themselves the comfort of a fire.

“Yacht or no yacht,” said Sandy, after they had been awake for a couple of hours, “we must have some sleep. You take first go, I'll be sentry.”

Sandy's watch passed without incident. But about half an hour afterwards Dick heard the faint chug-chug of an engine. He quietly awakened Sandy. Quickly the sounds grew louder, and they heard the shack door open. Tom, swinging a lantern, stumbled off

towards the landing-place. As on the night before, they now heard a yacht anchor and then the creak of oars.

There was some talk when the men came ashore. As they approached the shack stray phrases floated up to the listening boys. "Floor broken—shot one—made me stay."

The boys could see almost nothing of what happened next, but from the movements of the lantern and the sound of footsteps and of rowing they judged that brandy cases were being carried up to the shack. At last they heard a voice say:

"That's the last. So long, Tom."

Tom stood on the shore watching the receding row-boat, and then when the yacht's engine started, made his way back to the shack. For a while all was quietness, and it was not long before Sandy and Dick both fell sound asleep.

Suddenly they found themselves awake. The air was full of queer noises. They had been sleeping so heavily that at first they did not remember where they were. They sat listening in bewilderment. Dick was the first to collect his wits.

"Somebody's singing," he declared.

"It must be Tom, then," said Sandy, "but why on earth is he singing?"

"I'll tell you," said Dick. "He's been at the brandy."

Now that they were thoroughly awake they could make out the words:

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“What shall we do with the drunken sailor?  
What shall we do with the drunken sailor?

Early in the morning?

Hooray and up she rises,

Hooray and up she rises,

Early in the morning.”

“It’s a chanty,” said Sandy, “that’s what it is.”

“Well, it might be anything, the way Tom sings it. Let’s go to sleep again.”

At last, in spite of Tom’s uproar, they managed to do so. When they woke the sun was high.

“Tom won’t get out of bed early after his concert,” said Sandy, as they ate as much of the beans as they dared.

“And he’ll have a headache when he does.”

“You know,” went on Sandy, “I believe that old fellow’s not a bad lot. What do you suppose he’d do if we went down and gave ourselves up?”

“Hard to say. He seems less of a brute than the fellow they call Bill.”

“I’m tired of this hide-and-seek business,” said Sandy emphatically.

Nothing more was said, but both boys knew that when the can of beans was finished something would have to be done.

It was a couple of hours later when the door of the shack opened. As the man came out, the boys saw that he carried a rifle.

“Going to amuse himself shooting porcupines and squirrels,” said Dick.

But Tom made for the shore, and, when he got there, he sat down and started to undress. Evidently he was going to shake off the effects of the night's drinking by a bath. A moment later he floundered in and began to wade out.

"If we had that rifle we could bring him to terms," said Sandy suddenly. "Come on."

It was an impulse of the moment, and they were just in the mood to act upon it. The prospect of starvation had made even the cautious Sandy ready to take a chance. Their presence on the island might be discovered by Tom at any moment. Why should the moment not be of their choosing?

They raced down the hill.

## CHAPTER VII

### Sandy hits the Bull's Eye

Tom was standing in water up to his chest, about twenty yards out. All at once he turned his head and saw them. With a startled exclamation he began to wade in. He was nearer the rifle than the boys were, but the water hampered him at first. In the shallower water, however, he broke into a clumsy trot, splashed ashore, and snatched up the rifle.

The boys had lost the race, but it was too late to turn back. The man confronted them—an uncouth naked figure—as they came to a halt, gasping for breath.

“Stand back, or I’ll blow you to smithereens,” he said, pointing the rifle at them in an awkward sort of way, and then added: “Why, you’re only kids. Who in thunder are you?”

He lowered the rifle with evident relief and grinned.

Sandy and Dick hardly knew what to say or do. They had hoped to hold the rifle and to dictate terms, but things had gone the wrong way. They were in no position to be defiant. Tom, however, did not seem very formidable or hostile; his grin was almost friendly. But the two boys could not forget that after all he was one of the gang which had shot Pat.



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Full of confused thoughts and feelings, they stood tongue-tied, and waited for the man to make the first move. At last he said:

"You kids stand there while I get dressed. No monkey work, remember."

He shoved his wet legs into trousers and pulled on his shirt and sweater.

"Pick up the pail, and go ahead," he ordered.

They moved slowly up the path in single file. At the shack door Sandy whispered to Dick:

"Let me tell the story. Be ready to back me up."

Dick nodded, and they went in. Tom put some water on to boil and began, very deliberately, to slice bacon. He seemed embarrassed and ill at ease. Not till the meal was over and he had lit a pipe, did he begin to ask questions.

He wanted to know when they had come, how they had come, and why they had come.

Sandy told him of the wreck, but did not say that they had been driven out of their course. Finally Tom said:

"I dunno what Bill will say when he sees you. He ain't always very polite to strangers."

At this Sandy flamed out:

"Bill's a murderer, and you're no better."

"I didn't shoot the boy," stammered the man. "I was in the boat till I got thrown out. I had nothing to do with the shooting."

"You'll have to prove that," said Sandy drily. "We'll see about you when the boat comes."

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"What boat?" asked Tom uneasily.

"The boat we were with, of course. We got separated in the storm just before we struck. They'll be coming here to take us off."

"Suppose Bill comes first," said Tom.

"Well," said Sandy, "what if he does? Are you such a fool as to give us up? To help us is your only chance."

So far Dick had said nothing, but he had been looking very hard at Tom.

"You know," he said slowly, "this isn't the first time we've seen you. We know all about your gang and the old brick-yard."

Tom stared in surprise. He seemed to be searching for something to say, but nothing came.

"You'd better think things over," said Sandy, and there the talk ended.

Tom sat at one end of the shack in sulky, troubled silence, glancing from time to time at the boys, who sat at the other end, talking in whispers about their chances.

"Your recognizing him just put the lid on it," whispered Sandy. "I thought I had seen him before, but couldn't quite place him."

Nobody spoke during the evening meal. As they left the table, Dick murmured to Sandy:

"Must take turns at watching to-night. He might be up to tricks."

"All right. I'll go first, if you like," answered Sandy.

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"You kids better go to sleep," said Tom presently. "Where d'you want to lie?"

Dick lay down at one end of the shack, with Sandy sitting beside him. Tom stretched himself out at the other end, putting the rifle between himself and the wall. He was soon snoring. The night passed peacefully.

For the next two days the boys lived with Tom on more and more friendly terms. At breakfast on the third day Tom said, in a shamefaced way:

"Bill and the rest will be here to-night or to-morrow. You'd better make yourselves scarce while they're round. I don't want to get you into trouble."

"We'll sleep outside," said Sandy.

In the course of the afternoon Tom went off to the shore and left the rifle behind him.

"I don't think he had anything to do with the shooting," said Sandy. "He seems a harmless old fellow."

"I doubt if he could hit anything," said Dick. "Did you see how he holds the rifle?"

They took advantage of Tom's absence to unload the rifle, and to hide a box of ammunition which they found among his supplies.

Shortly after sunset Tom said:

"Better get along now."

They started up the hill towards their old camp.

"Look here!" called Tom in a surly voice.

They came back.

"If the gang come to-night," he said, "I'll be going

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with them. You'd better take what grub's left. I won't need it."

A few minutes later Sandy and Dick were up on the hill.

"That old fellow," said Dick, "is half ashamed, I think, of being in with that lot. I believe he'd chuck them if he got a chance."

They made themselves fairly comfortable, and settled down to wait and watch.

"Listen! What's that?" said Dick, an hour or so later.

Faintly across the water, in the still night air, came the throb of an engine. Presently, however, it stopped, and for some time they heard nothing more. They had almost decided that they had been mistaken when another sound struck their ears—a creak of oars. The noise of a boat grating on the rocks floated up to them. In the shack all was quiet, but the lamp was still burning.

In the dim moonlight the boys saw four men slowly approach the shack. They stood motionless for a moment by the window. Then they moved to the door, shoved it open, and entered. A few gruff exclamations and a laugh broke the silence. Then came sounds of talk.

"Something funny about those men," said Sandy. "I don't believe they're Tom's gang."

"Let's crawl nearer," said Dick.

They made their way down, avoiding the patches of moonlight. They felt sure that they would not be

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spotted in the darkness by anybody coming out of the shack, but they were ready to drop flat at any moment.

After a little manœuvring they reached a position from which they could look through the window. The heads and shoulders of three men were visible. There was an occasional sound of clinking glasses. Then they heard a man speak in a loud cheerful voice.

"Come on, Tom, let's get to business. You know what we've come for. Where is it?"

"Too bad," drawled Tom's voice in reply. "This is the last bottle. Another lot will be here in a day or two. Better wait, Mickie."

"You're a nice sort of liar, you are," retorted Mickie. "The stuff's here, and we mean to have it. If you hadn't been here, we would have had the cases down on the shore by this time. Why do you stick to a fellow like Bill anyway, a skunk who treats a man like you this way, leaving you alone here, while they get all the fun and money?"

The boys could not hear Tom's reply.

"These fellows are hijackers," said Sandy. "And old Tom's playing for time. Bill and his gang may be here any moment."

Mickie's voice was heard again.

"Give you quarter of an hour. Then you can hand over the stuff and come along with us, or get knocked on the head. If you weren't an old friend, we'd fix you at once."

Sandy drew Dick towards the water.

"We've quarter of an hour," he said.

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"What's the game?"

"A boat."

Two rowboats lay at the landing-place. Quickly but noiselessly they slipped one into the water.

"We'll row round to the other side," said Sandy, "and hide it. To-morrow we can try for the mainland."

It took about ten minutes to reach a hiding-place under overhanging cedar branches on the other side of the island.

They fastened the painter and started back towards the shack. Both of them knew that the safest thing was to stay concealed in or near the boat. But though nothing was said, both felt that they must be on hand in case there should be a chance to help Tom.

They had taken only a dozen steps when their ears caught the clear sound of a launch's engine. They crouched down where they were. Was it Bill, or was it the hijackers' launch?

They were not left long in doubt. The men in the shack had also heard the sound. One of them ran out and down to the shore. After a moment he came racing back.

"It's Bill," he shouted, "and one of our boats has drifted off. Some careless swine didn't pull her up."

"I thought maybe Bill would be along," said Tom.

"Well, here's something to remember us by," cried a voice.

There was the sound of a blow, the thud of a falling body, and a crash of breaking glass. The shack was in darkness. But only for an instant. The door was

flung open, and, as the men rushed out, their bodies showed black against leaping flames. The lamp had been knocked over, and the shack was blazing.

The boys stood dazed at the suddenness with which things had happened. Dick spoke first.

"Tom," he said. "Come on."

They ran towards the shack. The fire was beginning to crackle greedily. Fortunately the flames were as yet in the back half of the place. In the middle of the floor lay Tom, with blood streaming from a cut in his forehead.

"Drag him out," said Sandy. "I'll get the rifle and ammunition."

A moment later they were in the bushes a few yards off, watching the little house change into a roaring furnace. But even above the noise of the fire they could hear the shouting of men at the landing-place or out on the water. The cries were sharply punctuated by three or four shots.

The boys looked at one another.

"We'd better not hang round here," said Dick.

They glanced at Tom. He was sitting up, but still bewildered.

"Look here, Tom," said Dick suddenly. "Will you skip out with us?"

"Skip out? How?"

"In a boat. We swiped one from those fellows. Come on. The boat's right there." He pointed to where the boat was hidden.

Tom looked at the blazing shack.

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"I'll get blue murder for this business, and I'm sick of Bill. But I did my best to save the stuff, and Bill owes me money. Go on. You kids clear out. I'm going to talk to Bill."

The shouts of men coming up from the landing-place could be heard. By now the flames had reached down to the brandy and up to the roof. The lurid glare made hiding near the shack impossible.

They ran down to their boat and climbed in. At first all was confusion at the shack, but presently Bill's voice rose above the clamour.

"You drunken sot," he cried to Tom.

"I tried my best to save the stuff," said Tom. "Four to one. What could I do? But you've always treated me dirty, Bill. You owe me money, too."

"Money!" cried Bill angrily. "A dose of lead is what you ought to get."

"Like the poor kid you shot a couple of nights ago," said Tom. "You'll swing for that."

"Oh!" said Bill, "cut out that sob-stuff. The kid asked for it, didn't he? He was trying to swipe our boat. We've had another youngster bothering us since then. Pat Post he's called. We've got him safely locked up. But you're more trouble than any kids. What the blazes were you doing?"

"You give me my money," said Tom obstinately.

"Not a red cent. I'll——"

The speech was cut short suddenly, and the next thing the boys knew was that somebody was running and stumbling towards them. Sandy stood up.





HE STRAIGHTENED UP: THERE WAS A SHARP REPORT



"This way, Tom," he yelled.

Tom came crashing through the trees, and half fell, half jumped into the boat.

"Push off!" he shouted. "There'll be something doing in a minute."

He was right. Sandy's shout had been heard, and a man ran down to the shore.

"Tom's got a boat, Bill," he called. "Two kids with him."

The air was filled with confused cries, and then Bill's voice suddenly rose harsh and distinct. For a moment apparently he had lain on the ground, half dazed by Tom's blow, but now he was up again and yelling commands:

"Get the yacht and boats round here."

To Sandy the rowboat seemed like a loaded scow. He was pulling with every ounce of muscle, but the boat appeared only to crawl, not to jump. He felt like a man who dreams that he is being chased by an enraged bull and that he is continually stumbling. The yacht's propeller was now churning the water.

"We can't get clear away now," said Dick. "Pull along a bit and then in under the branches. The light will be on us in a jiffy if we stay out here."

Tom said nothing intelligible. He sat muttering to himself. The effects of the blow on his head from the hijackers and of his drinking had been shaken off for a moment in the excitement of his encounter with Bill, but now he was dull and inert. He did not seem to realize what was happening.

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At last the boat slid once more into the black protecting shadows of the overhanging trees. It struck the rocky shore with a bump which somewhat roused Tom. He straightened up and looked about him.

They had been none too quick. Shooting past the end of the island came the long white beam of the searchlight, playing now here, now there. They could only trust that the cedar branches to which they were clinging would fence them off from that peering beam, and that the bootleggers would assume that they had taken to the open.

The yacht rounded the tip of the island, and began to move in their direction. The light swept slowly in a semicircle from the shore to the open. It showed every tree and boulder with horrible vividness. An instant more, and it would touch their hiding-place—would it reveal them to the eyes of the watchers?

Sandy and Dick crouched as low as they could and forced Tom to do the same. All at once the light was playing directly on their trees. It seemed absolutely stationary. To escape detection was surely impossible. Though cowering down, the boys felt as if they were standing in the middle of a large empty stage in the dazzling glare of the footlights.

But at last the light began to shift off them and to move slowly—oh, so slowly—out from shore. And then just when they were wholly clear of its blinding whiteness, Tom, startled into wakefulness by the light, suddenly broke out in a crazy high voice:

“What shall we do with the drunken sailor?”

As swift as thought the light was back upon them. Dick had clapped his hand over Tom's mouth, but the mischief had been done. Shouts came from the yacht. They were trapped.

Sandy and Dick looked at one another, but neither spoke. Then Sandy, swiftly leaned forward and snatched something from the bottom of the boat. He straightened up; there was a sharp report, a noise of shattered glass, and blessed saving darkness once more wrapped them round. Throwing down the rifle, Sandy grabbed an oar, and with one thrust against the shore sent the boat gliding out clear of the trees. Then with noiseless strokes he began to row straight out from land.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Stowaway

As soon as the searchlight struck him, Pat knew that his game was up. He could not get away with the boat and would be lucky to save his life. A bullet went just over his head, and the next moment he fell sideways against the gunwale and rolled into the water. Even as he did so, the men fired again, and Pat heard their shouts of triumph just before the water closed over his head.

"Well," spluttered Pat, as he came up and struck out, "they think they've got me all right. Nearly did too."

He had, almost without thinking about it, begun to swim in the direction in which he had been rowing. Behind him he heard Bill shout to the men on the yacht to lower another rowboat. The coldness of the water Pat hardly noticed. He could think of only one thing. His scheme had failed, and the bitter part of the business was that he had missed success by the narrowest margin. And now there was nothing for it but to swim ashore again and hide. He might just as well have climbed a tree as Sandy and Dick had done.

The noise of oars in the second rowboat reached his ears. He glanced behind him and saw that he was now some distance from the landing-place. It would be safe to swim shorewards. But in the very act of turning Pat could only think of how beastly it was to be beaten and to crawl ashore defeated. What a miserable, tame ending to his venture!

Then, all at once, as he listened to the splash of the oars, Pat smiled. He turned away from the shore, and with swift eager strokes headed for the yacht. The searchlight had been turned off, but Pat could dimly make out the black bulk of the yacht about three hundred yards away.

He swam as fast as he could, for the success of his plan depended partly on speed. The thought which had flashed through Pat's mind was that the men in the second rowboat—he knew that there were at least two, for he had heard them talking—were perhaps the only ones who had been left on the yacht. If so, she would be deserted for a few moments. If he could reach her before anybody returned, he might stow himself away, gain the mainland, and bring help to Sandy and Dick. Where he was to hide and how he was to get off again were things Pat did not as yet worry about. He was content to see one step ahead.

The smoothness of the water allowed him to make good speed, and there was enough noise on shore to make his splashing inaudible. No sign of either rowboat. Apparently the men had picked up the drifting boat and gone ashore with it. He could see lights

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moving from shack to landing-place and back again. At any moment the men would be rowing the brandy cases out to the yacht.

Pat stared ahead. Slowly the yacht began to take more definite shape. Perhaps fifty yards more to go. Then he heard Bill's voice on shore:

"That's enough. Push off."

Only about the length of the swimming-pool at home, thought Pat. But by now his legs, clogged with heavy clothes, were beginning to tire; and, besides, the water was bitterly cold. He took ten strokes without looking ahead. Yes, the yacht was much nearer now—no doubt about it—but so was the rowboat. He could not see it, but the sound of the oars was loud in his ears. Five more strokes, and again he looked ahead. The yacht appeared to have rushed towards him. The stern towered directly above him. Two more strokes, and his hand was on her smooth side.

At almost the same instant the sound of rowing ceased, and the boat came alongside the yacht with a slight scrape. Pat noiselessly paddled round to the other side. He heard a man scramble on board, and then the noise of cases being pulled up and dumped down on the deck. Apparently there were just the two men. That meant that, when they rowed back for a second load, the coast would be clear. Pat would have his chance then.

"That's the last," the man in the boat said.

The other fellow climbed down, and they shoved off. At once Pat began to swim round to the other side.



There was nothing to climb up by where he was. On the shoreward side he found a rope ladder, and had just mounted a couple of rungs when he heard another rowboat close at hand. He had forgotten about the second boat, but it was too late to go back now. His legs and arms were stiff and cold. At any moment he expected to hear a shout behind him, to feel the ladder shaken, or to have his leg seized.

At last he was over the side, but barely had his foot touched the deck when he heard the voices of the men in the boat. He looked round for a hiding-place.

In front of him were piled the boxes which had just been brought on board. A few steps away, towards the bow, was something he guessed to be the search-light. It was off at present, but Pat instinctively felt it to be an enemy and turned towards the stern. At the head of the companion-way he felt the warm air strike upon his wet and shivering body. He was miserably cold, and looked longingly down into the dark warmth below decks.

He dived down the steps, and nearly broke his head against a partly open door. As he entered, he stubbed his bare toe, and almost cried out with the pain. There was no light in the place. Hurriedly Pat began to feel his way round the walls. Shelves, a map, two pictures—his hands passed over all these things, before they struck some clothing. He picked out a coat of heavy, rough material, quickly unhooked it, and slipped it on.

"A little large, but it'll do very nicely," murmured Pat to himself.

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Just as his arms slid into the warm sleeves, the trampling of footsteps sounded overhead. Suppose the man or men should come down. And all at once the mad risks of the whole venture filled his mind. What a fool he was to thrust himself into the hands of these fellows! Even if he were not discovered now, how could he hope to escape later? And then what? Why had he not stayed on the island? They might have been hungry for a few days, but help would have come somehow. Here he was, risking his own life and doing no good to Sandy and Dick.

The noise on the deck was still going on. Then there was silence, and a man's voice said:

"All right. I'm coming down."

Pat stood tense, not knowing what he should do if the man came in. Should he jump upon him, or should he let him enter and then dart up the stairs? But nothing happened. The man did not come. And at last Pat realized what the fellow had meant. He had, of course, gone down the ladder to the rowboat. That was what he had meant by "coming down". Probably the boat was half-way to the shore by this time.

Half running and half stumbling, Pat scrambled up the stairs. A moment or two later he was crouching down in the stern, his ears straining for the sound of oars.

He had not long to wait. The boats came, discharged their loads, and went back. On the next trip they brought Bill and the rest. The men climbed on board, with a creaking sound the two boats were hoisted, and

the davits turned inwards. The anchor chain rattled, a bell rang, and, almost directly beneath him, Pat heard and felt the thrashing of the water as the screw began to turn.

Some of the men had at once gone down into the saloon. The sound of their talk floated up the companion-way. Though nobody had come near Pat, he felt very exposed and insecure. What could he say if he were found? What would they do to him? Would it be better to jump overboard if he saw anybody approaching? For none of these questions had Pat an answer ready.

The yacht was now going full speed. The island was lost to sight. As Pat strained his eyes over the stern, he felt a drop of rain on his cheek.

"A nice cold drizzle," said Pat to himself. "Well, no moonlight may help my chances."

He looked towards the bow. The darkness was pierced by a line of light coming up the companion-way. He could make out the dark mass of one of the rowboats hanging on the davits. The sight suggested a plan. Why not hide in it? For a while at any rate he would be safe. If he stayed where he was he might be nabbed any moment.

At once Pat began to move forward on his hands and knees, keeping close to the rail. The voices in the saloon sounded louder now. From time to time he could hear a word. There was the pop of a cork being drawn. As he crept slowly on, the light from the saloon seemed to him dangerously bright. Was there

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anybody on deck to see him, or was the man at the wheel the only one who had not gone below?

The saloon door was flung wide and a man stumbled hastily up the steps. Before Pat could retreat, the fellow lurched out on to the deck, and nearly fell. He steadied himself and moved with rather uncertain steps to the rail. He was not more than two yards from Pat's head. Presently the man began to speak to himself and to the night in a thick confused voice. As far as Pat could make out, he seemed to be asking where the moon was, and to be declaring with some emphasis that moons were not what they used to be.

"Well," thought Pat, "he's not sober anyway. If it comes to a scrap, I ought to be able to manage him."

Pat argued that, if the man moved along, he was likely to stick to the rail. It was clear that he needed its support. Pat accordingly began to edge away from it. But, just as he started, the man took it into his head to move aft. He took a great floundering step, half lost his balance, and the next instant down came his boot on Pat's fingers.

Pat swallowed a yell, and the man stood there, swaying. The pain was terrible, especially when the man's body bent away from the rail, for then his whole weight—and he was a big thickset figure—came crushing down on Pat's hand. He had all but fainted with the torture, when suddenly he felt the weight gone. The man had once more staggered along. Pat watched him in a dull benumbed way, as if the whole affair did not in the least concern himself. Clinging to

the rail and muttering to himself as he went, the man stumbled on towards the stern. Soon the darkness hid him, though Pat could still hear the staggering footsteps.

Tenderly Pat lifted his crushed and bleeding fingers from the deck and nursed them with his sound hand.

"That brute is two hundred and fifty pounds if he's an ounce," he murmured. "I'd like to see what size splash he'd make if I heaved him overboard."

It was plain that the sooner Pat stowed himself away in a rowboat the better. His present position was anything but secure. The drunken fellow might come lurching back at any moment, or someone else might come up from the saloon. Indeed, just as Pat began to move forward again, a voice shouted up the stairs:

"Hank, where are you?"

An indistinct grunt came from the stern, followed by sounds which indicated that Hank was trying to get under way again. It was high time for Pat to be off.

He glided swiftly forward till he came to the davits. Climbing up and into the boat was not easy. One hand was more or less out of business, and the heavy long overcoat, which Pat was determined not to part with, hampered his movements. Every moment he expected to hear a shout behind him. But at last he flopped in, and, though the boat swung and creaked for a bit, the noise attracted nobody's attention.

Now a rowboat, as anybody who has tried sleeping in one knows, is not a comfortable bed. First, Pat tried lying on the thwarts, but they were the wrong distance

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apart. A bit of him was always sagging down. Then he stretched out on the bottom and used a thwart for a pillow, but the edge cut into his neck. At last he tried his head under the seat, and that was the most comfortless way of all. But in spite of pains and aches and danger Pat finally fell asleep, with the sound of swishing and hissing water in his ears. He knew that to fall asleep was thoroughly reckless, but he was too tired to care.

How long he slept he did not know, but suddenly he found himself awake. He was very stiff and cold, and at first did not remember where he was. It was still inky black; rain was still falling. He could hear men's voices in the saloon. The yacht was ploughing steadily ahead.

"No need to get out of bed yet," said Pat to himself. Not long after he heard Bill's voice.

"Must be nearly there now. It's about time."

The saloon lights went out, and Pat heard a port hole below him being opened. He leaned out and down over the gunwale of the boat as far as he dared.

"We'll try him now," said the man at the port hole.

Almost at once the yacht slowed down. Presently she was scarcely moving. Then a shaft of red light shone out from the port hole.

Pat hardly knew what to do. If the yacht were near land he ought to shift his quarters immediately. The boat might be lowered with him in it. What did the red light mean? Pat was too tired to think quickly. He peered out over the dark water to see if he could discern

land. Nothing but the black night met his gaze. But all at once his eye was arrested by a bright point of light. It gleamed, went out, and gleamed again. This time its brightness remained.

"Signal, of course," he said softly to himself. "Might have guessed that before."

The port hole was closed. The men in the saloon were moving about, evidently preparing to land. At once Pat slipped out of the boat, and made his way towards the stern. He must risk another encounter with Hank. In a few seconds he was crouching down in his old hiding-place. There was no sign of Hank.

The men came up from below. Pat smiled as he heard one of them swearing at the loss of his coat. Presently the two boats were lowered. Then a different set of noises told Pat that the boxes were being lowered, and finally he heard the dip of oars. The boats, he supposed, would return soon for a second load, but there was every reason why he should not wait. The longer he stayed the greater the chances of detection. Sooner or later he would have to swim; why not get it over?

When he had taken to the water in the early part of the night, Pat had been keyed up by excitement and high hopes. But now he was wretchedly stiff and cold. He had had little sleep and no food. The black night, the unknown distance he had to swim, the vagueness of his plans—all these things lowered Pat's spirits.

He stood up. His cold fingers fumbled half-unwillingly with the buttons of his coat. At last they were

undone. As the coat slipped from his shoulders, the raw night air and the steady drizzle struck on his shivering body. He climbed over the rail and began to lower himself. His injured hand was not much use. When his grip was on the lowest bar of the railing he was still several feet above the water, but there was no help for it. He let his body hang out as far as he could, and then, thrusting against the side of the yacht with his feet, he let go. As he hit the water with a resounding splash, a man on the yacht called out:

“What’s that?”

For a moment or two Pat trod water noiselessly. Nothing happened. Apparently the man was content to leave the splash a mystery.

“Here goes,” said Pat, and as quietly as he could, he struck out for where he supposed the shore to lie.



## CHAPTER IX

### Listening In

The night was as black as the inside of a chimney. Not a star showing, not a glimmer of moonlight. The cold steady drizzle was still falling. So chilly was the air that to Pat the water felt almost warm.

The great difficulty was direction. Where was he to head for? All he had to guide him was the confused memory of the signal light. He had taken a final look at it before leaving the yacht and had tried to fasten its position in his mind. He could not see it now, and there was nothing to check him if he began to diverge from a straight course. Then a troubling thought occurred to him. If he did swim straight for the light, would he not blunder into the men from whom he was doing his best to escape?

"All I can do," decided Pat, "is to go on kicking this beastly water behind me and keep my ears open."

To help his hearing he used the breast stroke, and held his head high. As it turned out, it was a good thing he did, for even with this precaution he was all but run down. He heard the creak of rowlocks and the dip of oars, and the next instant a boat was almost on

top of him. He had just time for a stroke to the side. The blade of one oar barely missed his head. Evidently he was following the right line, and, if the boat had had time to unload and return so quickly, the shore must be fairly near. Pat also argued that the second boat would follow more or less the same line as the first. He at once struck off to the right and did not again turn landwards until he had swum some distance.

Though at first the water had seemed almost warm, by now it seemed icy. Pat was chilled through, and not far from exhaustion. He had not many clothes on, but their leaden weight was dragging him down. Feebler and feebler grew his arm strokes, and his legs felt as if each kick had to be the last. There was a pain and stiffness in his stomach muscles that Pat feared meant the beginning of cramp. The darkness destroyed any sense of progress, and, besides, how could he be sure that he had not gradually turned off the course? Perhaps by now he was swimming along parallel with the shore. Yet he did not dare to experiment by changing his direction. In vain he listened for the sound of rowing. For anything that he could hear or see, Pat might have been in mid-ocean.

"I'll try it," he said.

He shut his mouth tight, held his nose, and sank, to try the depth. Down, down, down, he went. Would he never strike bottom? At last his foot touched sand, and up he came, the water rushing past his ears.

"Ten more strokes," muttered Pat. "That's about all I'm good for."

Slowly he counted them off. He had reached nine when he heard a low sound of voices to his left. Were the men on shore or in a boat? He let his legs sink, and all at once his toes were on the sand. The water was up to his chest. Slowly and wearily he forced his body shorewards. Gradually, very gradually, the water grew shallower. It sank to his waist, to his knees. With his last bit of strength he broke into a weak staggering trot, and a moment later fell headlong on a sandy shore.

Then a fit of shivering seized him. His teeth chattered; his legs, arms, and shoulders shook; and his head was racked with pain. The cold night breeze and the ceaseless drizzle pierced his clammy clothes.

Pat had sense enough to know that he must keep on the move. As soon as he could in a measure control his movements, he stripped off his clothes and wrung them out. As he did so, he danced about until the shivering finally ceased. When he felt once more the wet clinging shirt upon his back, he was tormented by visions of a bed with warm, dry, rough blankets. Great cosy red ones, six or seven deep. Would he ever again have too many layers of them?

"If I can only strike a farm house somewhere near," said Pat, "I won't be too badly off."

But this idea had no sooner occurred to him, than he began to see certain difficulties. What kind of welcome could a wet, ragged, barefoot boy expect from a farmer whom he had dragged out of bed in the middle of the night? He was more likely to have a

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dog set on him than to be offered a bed. But, after all, if there were a farm house, there would be a barn. A night in the hay would be good enough. Where he was Pat did not know and hardly cared. He supposed he was no longer in Canada, but was too tired to speculate further.

He felt the same lack of interest in the movements and whereabouts of the bootleggers. Their yacht had helped him to the mainland, and now he wished to have nothing more to do with them. The only thing Pat feared was that they might return to the island and find Sandy and Dick before he could rescue them.

By now Pat had jumped and shaken a little warmth into himself. He began to walk inland. The first thing to do was to strike a road. The sharp wind from the east cutting through his thin clothes made him think of nothing but the necessity of finding shelter—a stable, a barn, anything to put between him and the nipping breeze.

He trudged up and down over sand dunes. It was heavy going, but Pat put his head down and ploughed ahead. The exertion warmed him somewhat, but he was nearly dropping with fatigue. Presently he seemed to be reaching the end of the sand. At any rate the ground felt firmer beneath his feet. Soon, no doubt, he would be able to go at a brisker pace.

He had gone perhaps a couple of hundred yards from the water when he heard the murmur of voices. He was on the point of calling out. Why he checked himself he hardly knew. But, instead of shouting, he

quietly dropped on his stomach and began to crawl towards the sound.

"That's that," said a voice.

"Time enough, too. Now for something to eat and drink," said another.

There was the noise of a creaking door. A faint light showed for a fraction of a second, and by its momentary gleam Pat dimly saw the outlines of a shack about fifteen yards away. It did not look like a farm house; and anyway this seemed hardly the place for a farm. Did these men belong to the gang? If not, what were they doing sneaking about at this time of night? Yet, even if these were bootleggers, the shack might afford shelter after they had left. There might not be another house within miles. Indeed, was it not likely, almost certain, that the gang would choose a lonely part of the coast on which to land their stuff?

Nearer and nearer Pat crept, moving round to the back of the little building. At last his hand rested on the log wall. Cautiously he rose to his feet. Joined to the rear of the shack was a little shed with a roof sloping down to within about four feet of the ground. While he was standing there, uncertain what to do, a spark or two scurried out of the shack chimney. A snug fire! When Pat thought of it he felt more bitterly cold than ever.

Hardly thinking what he was doing, but moved by some vague impulse to get nearer the warmth, Pat climbed up on the low roof. He was there, indeed,

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almost before he was aware of it. He crawled upwards till he came to the wall of the shack itself.

Then he stood up. In the middle of the wall was a square opening. Pat put his head over the sill and peered in. There was no sound. There was, however, a faint glimmer of light, but where it came from he could not make out. Evidently the place was a sort of attic.

The warmth was irresistible. Why not risk going in? He could lie quietly there till morning. Better certain comfort with a little danger than tramping an unknown countryside all night. Even while he was weighing the pros and cons, Pat was noiselessly raising himself to the opening.

He was almost ready to put one leg over the sill. Then he hastily lowered himself again to the shed roof. A bright unblinking eye had stared at him out of the dark attic. If he had been less desperate for shelter, Pat would probably have jumped to the ground and taken to his heels. But the night air was piercing, and Pat was wet and benumbed. And, besides, he hated to be beaten. So, instead of bolting, Pat crouched down and waited. But above him in the attic all was silent. The only sounds were those of talk in the room below.

Pat straightened himself by inches and again stared through the opening. No sign of the bright light, only the faint glimmer which he had noticed at first. Again Pat raised himself to climb; but, before his leg was over the sill, the dazzling beam was once more upon him. This time Pat was bolder. He stayed where he was

and stared at the light. It did not move, nor did he.

Then slowly Pat's leg moved through the window frame and down to the floor. The other leg followed. He stood rigid and puzzled. At last he took a step forward and stretched out a hand. His fingers touched and moved along the smooth metal of a rifle barrel. Pat advanced, and at the far end of the barrel found a flash light, so fastened that its rays passed down the rifle barrel and out into the dark night.

Then Pat remembered. This, of course, was the signal light which he had seen from the yacht. He had had little doubt that the men below were the boot-leggers. This settled it. But nothing short of certain and immediate danger would have induced Pat to face once more the cold night air.

When he glanced away from the flashlight, his eyes at first could distinguish nothing in the room. Gradually, as he became used to the darkness, he set to work, with the stealthiness of a cat, to explore the place. He was tempted to use the flashlight, but thought it safer not to tamper with anything. The voices below sounded fairly loud, and Pat hoped that they might drown the noise of his movements.

What he wanted to find above all else was something to lie on and something to cover his shivering body. On hands and knees he crept round the walls. The miserable place seemed as bare as his hand. No straw, no old horse-blankets, not even a sack. There was nothing for it but a hard cold bed.

He had just come to this conclusion when his right hand felt warm bricks. He had forgotten the chimney. It came up in the middle of one wall. Here, Pat decided, was the place to curl up and forget his troubles. He was arranging himself so as to get as much of his body as possible against the chimney when a faint, very faint, gleam appeared directly beneath his eyes. A knot in one of the boards dried by the heat from the chimney had dropped out.

At once Pat put his eye to this peephole. He could not see very much. The room beneath was dimly lighted, probably with a lantern. The legs of one man and the head of another were visible. They were sitting in front of the fire.

As his eye was not much use, Pat tried his ear. He could hear much better than he could see. There was a sizzling, crackling sound which was agony to Pat—the sound of frying bacon. His mouth watered. Never before had he felt so utterly hollow.

“If I can’t share the grub, I can listen in,” thought Pat.

“Hurry up with that bacon,” said a voice, which Pat recognized by its peculiar snarl as belonging to Bill. “We should be getting along, and I’m half frozen. I’d like to know who swiped my overcoat. Throw on some more wood.”

Pat was glad to hear that it was Bill’s coat he had taken, and only regretted that he had not dropped it into the lake.

There was the sound of wood being thrown on the



fire, but no more talk for a while. Pat knew only too well what that meant and wished that he were silent for the same reason.

"The beggars are eating," he muttered.

But a second later Pat had forgotten even bacon and hunger. Stiff with surprise and excitement, he was pressing his ear harder than ever on the knot-hole, eager to catch every syllable. He had heard Bill's snarling voice say:

"Jim Stephens! If we get him, I don't care about anything else."

Pat's heart was thumping so hard that he thought the men below must hear it.

"If we don't get him, he'll get us," said another man with an oath.

"He's queered too many of our schemes," chimed in a third. "Why in blazes can't he switch off and get some of the other fellows? They'll be taking our trade."

"Talk! talk! talk!" said Bill slowly and scornfully. "Words'll never hurt him. Are you willing to take a chance? If we're caught, you know what it means. If we're not caught, it means money. Lots of it."

There was a murmur of agreement from the other men.

"All right," went on Bill. "Then listen."

There was a moment's dead silence.

In his anxiety to hear every word of what Bill was going to say, Pat slightly shifted his position. In doing so he sent some gritty dirt down through the hole. It

fell on the floor beneath with what seemed to Pat a terrible rattle.

"What have you got up there, Red?" asked Bill.

"Rats, I guess. Lots of them running round."

"Look here! Did you turn off the light, Red?"

"No, I forgot. I knew you fellows would be hungry, and I got busy with the grub."

"Well, nip up and do it. We can't take any risks."

Pat heard a chair scrape along the floor and a man's footsteps. Where would the fellow come up? Pat had seen no stairs leading down. If he were going to move, he must do so quickly. A corner would probably be safer than where he was. But what corner? The trapdoor might be in a corner. There was no time for hesitation. Instinctively Pat moved away from the signal light, and backed into a corner about a dozen feet behind him. There he lay prone.

He heard the man climbing a ladder and the trapdoor being raised. Luckily it was at the other end of the attic. Light came up from the room below. It was not very bright, but it might reveal Pat's body if the man should glance his way. Through the aperture appeared a head and shoulders, but for the present at any rate luck was on Pat's side. The man was not looking in his direction. Pat lay breathless. He could hear Bill's voice going steadily on, but could make out no words.

The man climbed into the loft, and hooked up the trapdoor. Then he went over to the window and turned off the flashlight. Pat's face was down on the floor.

He knew that the dangerous moment would come when the man turned. But Red was in a hurry to go below to hear Bill's scheme. The trap door was unhooked, and then, after what seemed endless minutes, Pat heard it slam down.

Slowly he began to crawl back to his listening post. When once more his ear was at the hole he heard Bill say:

"So that's the scheme, and that's the date. Are you on?"

"You bet we are," said one man, and the others backed him up.

"All right. We'll get together again and make the plan fool-proof. Now, Hank, for your business."

Pat had escaped detection by Red, but in the few minutes away from the knot hole he had missed everything. Jim Stephens was his father, and these men were plotting against him. But what was the plot, and when was it to be carried out?

## CHAPTER X

### Pat Changes a Dollar

Pat's head was whirling. The knowledge that the men in the room below were plotting against his father had come with bewildering suddenness. He lay motionless, his mind filled with confused thoughts.

Then all other thoughts and feelings gave place to anger, anger that these miserable fellows were deliberately planning to ruin, perhaps to kill, his father. Well, their plan was going to fail, and a glow of pride warmed him as he thought that his wits must save his father and defeat Bill.

"The first thing to do is to hear all I can," thought Pat, and again put his ear to the knot-hole.

Bill was talking to the man called Hank.

"Now, Hank, what you've got to do is to get this package across. You know what's in it, and you know what to do with it when you get there."

"When?" asked Hank sulkily.

"Day after to-morrow."

"How?"

"On the *Irene*—Pier D—she sails at 10 a.m. All

you've got to do is to go aboard and give this to the captain."

"What good's this—half of a dollar bill?"

"You give it to him and say: 'Money talks'. He has the other half. That's all you have to remember. Can you get that into your thick head?"

"All right," said Hank. "But how do I get ashore? If they recognize me they'll nab the stuff."

"That's all fixed. Nobody will see your pretty face. Must be off now. The car will be waiting for us. You stay here all to-morrow, Hank."

Pat heard the men get up and go out. The door slammed behind them. Then dead silence.

Pat had hoped to hear more about the plot, but he had been disappointed. All this talk about Hank was no use to him.

He sat up with his back to the chimney and tried to put his thoughts in order.

Plainly, the first thing to do was to get back to Canada. The talk of smuggling a package across could only mean that he was in the States. Whereabouts in the States, of course, he did not know. He must get to the nearest railway station, and then the rest of the journey would be simple. But, as he said this to himself, Pat felt in his pockets. He felt again, and then carefully turned them inside out. A handkerchief, his diary, and one wet crumpled bill was all he found. Pat knew that on the island he had had three bills in his pocket, a ten, a five, and a one. Where had the other two gone? He retraced his actions—his swim

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out from the island, his hiding on the yacht, his second swim.

"I know," he said to himself. "It was when I shook out my wet clothes on the shore. They must have fallen out."

The question was: Which bill was he holding in his hands? Ten dollars, he felt sure, would pay his fare home; five dollars would at least take him a good bit of the way; but what could he do with a single dollar? He could, of course, try to get a job and earn money, but that meant delay, and the case was more than urgent. Hatless, barefoot, and ragged, he felt that he was in no position to borrow money, and anyway he knew nobody in this part of the world.

A loud snore in the room below interrupted his thoughts. Hank was apparently sleeping off the effects of his drinking, and would not be easily disturbed. Pat stood up and tiptoed over to the flashlight, unfastened it, and turned it on.

He held in his hand a one dollar bill. Gloomily he stood there, looking at the wretched bit of paper which might just as well have been marked with ten or five. And suddenly Pat's happy confidence in his ability to defeat Bill began to waver. He felt rather tired and helpless.

"What blinking good is one dollar?" Pat asked himself bitterly.

He looked out the window. The rain had stopped. He thought that he had better be on his way while Hank was still asleep. He felt a good deal more com-

fortable than when he had crawled into the attic, but he was ravenously hungry. He slipped the flashlight into his pocket, feeling that it would probably be useful, and climbed out of the window.

He was on the point of walking away from the shack when he remembered something. The men in the shack had had a meal. Suppose they had left some bread and bacon lying on the table. There must be some food in the place, for Hank's orders were to stay there all the next day.

He walked noiselessly back to the door, and listened with satisfaction to Hank's steady snoring.

"I'll chance it," he said. "If the beggar wakes up I can run."

Gently he began to press upon the door.

"I hope the beastly thing won't creak," said Pat to himself.

Slowly and silently the door swung inwards. Inside, all was dark. The lantern had gone out or had been extinguished. So far so good, but now came the ticklish part of the business. Pat pointed the flashlight downwards and turned it on. At first he saw nothing but a circle of bare floor. Gradually he shifted the beam of light. All at once the lower part of a chair and a man's foot came into the bright circle. Immediately Pat slipped to the right, so as to be behind the man who sat there.

The flashlight had showed him that the fellow was sitting at a table, his head resting on his arms. His face was hidden, but in the momentary gleam of light

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Pat had noticed that he wore a rough brown suit and that his tan boots were tied with black laces. He was still snoring heavily.

By inches Pat drew nearer. He directed the light to the leg of the table, followed the leg up, and then let the beam creep along the surface of the table. With his left hand he shaded the light on the side near the man.

Suddenly the light stopped moving. It had rested, not on a loaf of bread, but on a small paper parcel. The parcel did not interest Pat. The thing which had caught his eye was half of a dollar bill tucked under the string.

Closer and closer Pat came until he was not more than eighteen inches from the sleeping figure. He reached the edge of the table and stretched out an eager hand. But before his fingers could close upon the bill the man in the chair stirred uneasily and grunted in his sleep. Off went the flashlight, and Pat stood tense.

With a second grunt the man settled down once more. Pat did not dare risk the light again, and, besides, it was no longer needed. In the darkness his fingers touched the package and felt their way towards the bill. In another moment he had drawn it from under the string and had reached the door with swift, noiseless steps.

"If a dollar bill's no good, half a one is all right," said Pat, with a grin. "If it'll take Hank to Canada, why not me?"



He paused suddenly.

"What an idiot I was!" he said. "I must leave Hank a half bill."

He turned on the flashlight and laid it on the ground. Then he took out his own dollar bill, smoothed it out in the light, and deliberately tore it in two. One half he rolled into a little ball and tossed it away.

"Mustn't get mine and Hank's mixed," he remarked.

It took some courage to enter the shack again, but he knew the lay of the land this time. Once more he tiptoed behind the man and up to the table, and once more he reached out to the parcel. It took only a second to slip the half of his bill under the string, and to escape.

Pat had forgotten all about his plan of getting food in the shack. Not until he was a hundred yards or so from the place did he remember this omission. But he had no intention of risking a third intrusion. His business now was to find a road. Bill had spoken of a car waiting for them, and that must mean that a road was fairly near.

So it proved. Pat had not walked more than a quarter of a mile before he came out on a road. He turned along it, and forgot his fatigue and hunger in the pleasure of moving along a smooth surface with a swinging stride.

Presently a pale light showed in the sky, and Pat saw ahead of him a winding road dotted here and there with puddles from the night's rain. What pleased

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him, however, was that the road ran through farming country.

"I should like to find a house soon," he said.  
"And then an invitation to breakfast."

A few minutes later the road turned sharply to the left, and there, set back among trees, was a group of farm buildings.

There were no signs of life about the place, and Pat did not wish to spoil his welcome by rousing people at an unearthly hour. He sat down by the side of the road and waited. The growing warmth of the sun was almost as comforting as a meal.

How long he stayed there Pat had no exact means of judging. All at once he was brought to his feet by the sound of cheerful whistling. A man had just come out of the back door and was walking towards the barn-yard.

"Now for it," thought Pat.

The click of the gate, as he opened it, attracted the man's attention. He stopped and looked at the boy before him.

"Hello, son," he said, as Pat came up to him.  
"You're up early. What can I do for you?"

"Do you think you could give me some breakfast?"

"Sure I could. Willing to work?"

"Yes," said Pat.

"Well, come along. Can you milk?"

"Not very well. But I'll try."

They went into the cow-stable, and Pat did what he could to help with the milking. His slowness only

amused the farmer, and, when the job was done, he said:

"Come along to the house. She'll have the grub ready now."

Just before they went in by the back door the farmer turned to Pat in a rather shamefaced way.

"You speak polite to the missus, son, or there'll be ructions. She ain't very fond of boys."

Pat nodded, and they went in.

"Breakfast ready, Martha?" said the farmer. "Here's a hungry boy."

Martha was a thin wiry woman with an ill-tempered look on her sharp face. Her voice was no better than her looks.

"Who is he?" she snapped, and looked hard at Pat.

"Oh, he's all right. He's willing to work," said the man.

"Well, sit down," said Martha.

Pat's enjoyment of porridge, bacon and eggs was partly spoiled by Martha's ferrety stares. He began to feel that he was almost a criminal. How much of his story should he tell if he were questioned? To the farmer he might have made a clean breast of the whole business, but he felt that Martha would not believe him. Before he had time to decide what to say, Martha turned her artillery on him.

"What's your name, boy?"

"Pat Stephens."

"Where are you from?"

"Canada."

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"What are you doing here? What do you want?"

"To go back to Canada."

"How did you get here?"

"By boat."

"What boat?"

"I don't know her name."

"What did you come for?"

"I can't tell you exactly."

As Pat got into deeper and deeper water, Martha grew more and more suspicious. She turned to her husband.

"That's a nice story he tells, isn't it? Why do you bring such people round the place?"

"Oh, the boy's all right, Martha. You've rattled him; that's all. I need somebody to help me with the fencing to-day. He'll do fine. Come on, son. I'll get you some old boots and stockings."

They beat a retreat, Martha sending a sour look after them.

All morning Pat helped dig post holes for a new bit of fence. The farmer asked no questions, and Pat volunteered no information. They returned to the house for dinner, and ate their meal under the silent disapproval of Martha.

During the afternoon's work Pat found out that the nearest port was about five miles distant. He supposed that it was there he should find the *Irene* moored at Pier D.

Supper was no more cheerful than dinner. Martha, it was plain, wished to be rid of Pat as soon as possible.

She had no intention of offering him a bed for the night. There was nothing for it but to take to the road again and to sleep where he could. As soon as the meal was over Pat said good-bye, and opened the door.

"Guess I'll do my chores now," said the farmer, and came out with Pat.

Once they were outside, with the door shut behind them, he put his arm through Pat's and drew him off to the barn.

"Got much money, son?"

"No," said Pat. "Just enough to take me across, if that."

"Well, you sleep in here," pointing to the hayloft. "What the missus don't know won't hurt her. I'll bring you some breakfast somehow. Good night."

## CHAPTER XI

### Money Talks

The early morning sunlight streaming through a high window in the barn woke Pat in his bed of hay. He stretched himself luxuriously and climbed down to the floor. After a long dreamless sleep he felt ready for anything. All was going well. Hank would not suspect the theft of the half-bill. The *Irene* was only five miles away. With decent luck he should reach home that night and see his father. It would be a simple matter then to send help to Sandy and Dick. To crown all, the farmer had promised him breakfast.

He had not long to wait. The farmer's whistling interrupted his thoughts, and a moment later the door opened.

"Sleep well, son? Here's some grub."

While Pat was making away with bread and butter and cold beef, the farmer continued:

"Now see here. I'm going to drive into town in a little while, and I'll take you along. But don't hang round here and let the missus see you. You slip down the road and wait for me at the little bridge. Understand? You'd better keep those boots of mine."

Pat thanked him and at once started off. The little bridge was only a few hundred yards along the road. In the deep grass by the roadside Pat sat down to finish his breakfast.

As he munched he looked down the road from time to time for the farmer's car. Presently a man came in sight, a sturdy fellow, striding along. Pat paid no special attention to him till he was quite close. Then it suddenly flashed upon him that this was not the first time he had seen that brown suit. Instinctively he glanced at the man's feet. Brown boots and black laces. It was Hank.

"Good morning," said Pat.

Hank nodded and passed.

"You'll talk more," said Pat to himself, "when you find out about the bill."

Quarter of an hour later a Ford car rattled along and pulled up by the bridge.

"Hop in, son," said the farmer.

Pat had just begun to enjoy the drive when the car caught up to Hank. At once the farmer slowed up.

"Going to town? Want a ride?"

"Sure."

"All right. Jump in."

The man got into the back seat. A few minutes later the car entered the outskirts of a fair-sized town.

"I'll take you down to the docks," said the farmer to Pat. "The *Irene* isn't it?"

Pat wished the farmer hadn't mentioned the *Irene*. He felt Hank's eyes turned sharply on him.

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"Where'll I drop you?" said the farmer to Hank.

"Oh, the docks will do for me too," said Hank.

The docks soon came in sight, and beyond them the great blue stretch of Lake Huron. They soon found the *Irene*, and Hank and Pat got out of the car.

Just as the farmer was about to drive off, Pat had a sudden impulse to tell him everything and to ask him for money for his passage to Canada. But would the farmer believe him? What did he know of Pat? Pat had told him that he had enough money to pay his fare. He was still undecided when the farmer said:

"Well, so long, son."

Pat had just time to thank him before the car drove off. The chance was gone, and he would have to depend on his own wits. A few feet away stood Hank, looking at him with curiosity and suspicion.

"Are you crossing on the *Irene*, kid?" he asked.

"Yes."

"How did you manage that? She's not a passenger boat."

Pat did not know what to say.

"No—but I think—at least, I hope the captain will take me," he stammered.

The man gave him another stare and moved off. Moored to the dock, only a few yards from them, lay the *Irene*, a dingy-looking craft. Men were busy getting the cargo on board. Standing on the deck and directing the work was a short thickset man whom Pat guessed to be the captain.

Pat stood where he was, uncertain what move to



make. Things were not turning out at all as he had hoped. Hank had the wrong half-bill in his pocket. No doubt of that. But, nevertheless, he was an ugly customer to deal with.

While Pat still hesitated, he saw Hank step on board the *Irene* and approach the captain. The two men talked for a moment and then went aside. Hank drew something out of his pocket and handed it to the captain. The captain nodded, and Hank moved off to the bow away from the crew.

Pat had hoped to see Hank sent about his business. But the captain had not bothered to compare the two half-bills. Hank was snugly on board, and Pat found himself left high and dry. The cargo was nearly all loaded. If Pat were to do anything, it must be at once.

"Now or never," he murmured to himself, and stepped on board.

"What do you want?" said the captain brusquely, as Pat came up.

"May I speak to you a moment, sir?"

"Yes, but hurry up; we're just off. What do you want?"

"I want to go across on the *Irene*."

"This is not a passenger boat."

"I know," said Pat, "but——" and he drew out his half-bill. "Money talks," he said.

"How many of you fellows are there?" asked the captain impatiently. "I've got my man; come on, clear out."

"But you've got the wrong man," said Pat.

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The captain stared at him.

"Look at what he gave you," went on Pat, "and at your own half."

The captain fished both out of his pocket and examined them in silence. Finally he said:

"Let's see yours."

Pat handed it over and glanced towards the bow. Hank was scowling at him with undisguised suspicion and hostility.

Suddenly the captain wheeled round towards the bow.

"Here! You!" he shouted.

Hank came forward.

"What d'you want?" he said sulkily.

"Want? Get off at once."

"Not if I know it," said Hank. "My way's been paid."

"I only know one thing about you. You're the wrong man. Walk or swim."

"Nothing doing," said Hank obstinately.

The captain turned.

"Cast off," he called.

The ropes which held the *Irene* to the dock were quickly drawn on board. So too were the gang-planks. The engine started.

"You've still got time to jump," said the captain quietly.

Hank stared defiantly and did not move. The *Irene* had begun to draw away from the wharf. Exactly what happened in the next second Pat did not know. It

was all too quick. But what he did see was the captain striding towards the side of the ship, and in his hands Hank, held by the collar and the slack of his trousers and kicking wildly in the air. For an instant he held Hank suspended over the side and then let him go. Hank went sprawling into the water, face downwards.

The captain turned to Pat.

"I'm afraid," he said gravely, "that the water isn't very clean just there."

Pat glanced back. Hank had come gurgling to the surface. A rope was lowered to him from the dock. He clambered up, and stood dripping and motionless, staring after the receding *Irene*.

Pat had won his passage across, but felt, as he glanced back, that he had left behind him an enemy who had not accepted defeat.

## CHAPTER XII

### Hank Scores

The captain went away, and Pat was left, watching the receding shore-line and rather troubled in his thoughts. He did not know where he would be landed, but he felt confident that, if he could slip ashore unnoticed, he could manage to reach home that night. Bill, he remembered, had said something about arrangements having been made to prevent Hank being recognized when he landed in Canada. Pat wondered what the plans were and whether he would be spotted as an impostor. He longed to ask the captain's advice and help, but Pat knew that that would not do. After all, he had no business to be on the *Irene*; it was he, not Hank, who should have been thrown into the water.

He heard a step behind him, and turned.

"Who was that fellow I threw overboard?" asked the captain.

"I don't know."

"He looked the kind of fellow who has to be smuggled over. But you don't. You're only a kid. You shouldn't be in this sort of game at your age. What have you been up to?"

Pat flushed, but said nothing.

"Don't like to tell, eh? Well, I'll take you over. But you'd better go straight from now on."

"Yes," murmured Pat in an agony of embarrassment.

"I suppose you know how you're to be landed?"

"Not exactly. Couldn't I just walk off?"

"No. The *Irene* goes to Bruceville, but I've got to hand you over to the proper people before we get in. That's the bargain. I'll warn you in time."

The captain turned on his heel and walked away. Who were "the proper people"? Did they know Hank by sight? If so, how would they greet Hank's substitute? To these questions Pat had no answer. He could only wait and see how things turned out.

Early in the afternoon the Canadian shore came in sight. Pat watched it growing clearer and wondered what the next hour would bring.

When the *Irene* was about half a mile out from land, the captain came to him.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yes," said Pat, with a horrible sinking feeling.

"All right. Come along."

The *Irene* was at the moment moving parallel with the land. Presently she slackened her speed a little.

"There they are," said the captain.

Pat looked where he was pointing. A rowboat with two men in it was coming alongside. It was hidden from the land by the *Irene*. A ladder was lowered, which one of the men grasped.

"Now," said the captain, "down you go."

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There was nothing for it but to obey. Pat climbed down and into the boat.

"Lie down, and be quick about it," said one of the men.

Pat did as he was told. The rowboat was shoved clear of the *Irene*, and Pat was alone with the two men.

At first he had been too dazed to understand. Now he saw the scheme. When the rowboat emerged from behind the *Irene*, it still appeared to hold only two men. Nobody on shore would suspect that it had taken a passenger off the *Irene*. The whole business had been done in an instant.

Pat was lying with his head towards the stern. At his feet was the oarsman. Almost directly above his face was the second man. A potato sack, slimy with the fish it contained—Pat knew by the smell that they were pike—was thrown over him. He was now almost completely hidden. He had never felt so helpless.

"Why didn't Hank come?" asked the man in the stern, bending over Pat.

"He was stopped at the last moment," said Pat.

"He met with an accident."

"And Bill sent you, did he?"

"Yes."

"Well, it don't matter. You look kind of young, though, for this sort of job. What's your name?"

Pat was not ready for the question. He had not thought of what name he should give if asked. His real name would not do. He must not do or say anything to suggest that he was related to Jim Stephens,

the revenue officer. Suddenly his old nickname flashed into his mind.

"My name?" he said. "Post."

"That's not a bad name for a special messenger," said the fellow, with a chuckle. "What's your first name?"

"Pat."

Nothing more was said. A few minutes later Pat heard a voice, apparently from another rowboat, call out:

"What luck?"

"Oh, not bad," said the man in the stern, lifting up the bag of fish.

"We've got another," he added, with a laugh, "but it's too big to hold up."

He let the bag of fish fall on Pat's face, and, though he mumbled an apology, Pat knew that it had not been an accident. He was only a youngster, and they were making sport with him.

Pat did not really care about the fish being on his face. What troubled him was something much more serious. What was going to happen when they landed? What was he expected to do with these men? Would they suspect him? And, if they did, what then?

For perhaps half an hour nothing happened. The man at Pat's feet went on rowing steadily. Neither of them paid any attention to Pat.

"All right," said the man in the stern at last.

The oars were shipped, and a moment later the boat grated on a sandy shore.

"Hop out," said the man in the stern.

They stepped out, and Pat looked about him. It was a quiet stretch of shore. Off to the right he could see the harbour the *Irene* had entered. It was two or three miles away.

The man who had been in the stern picked up the bag of fish and nodded to the other fellow, who pushed out and at once began to row back towards the town.

"Come on," said the man to Pat and strode off away from the water.

Pat followed. There did not seem anything else to do. They climbed a slope and almost immediately came out upon a road. Fifty yards along it to their right was a pretty little cottage set back among trees.

"Come in," said the man, as they reached it.

There were two rooms, one leading off the other.

"This your first trip?" the man asked.

"Yes."

"Going to town to-night?"

"Yes."

"Better wait till it's dark. Hank always did."

"I suppose so," said Pat, longing to escape every moment.

"I'll get some grub ready. Expect you're hungry."

He got up and went out to the back room.

As soon as he had disappeared, Pat moved to the front door. He was ravenously hungry, but was keener on escaping than on eating. Now was his chance. He could run down the road and hide among the bushes. He stealthily opened the door. There was a



step in the kitchen. The man stood in the doorway with a frying pan in his hand.

"Here, you come and do the spuds, while I fry the fish."

For a moment Pat hesitated, and then went into the kitchen.

By the time the meal was over, it was beginning to get dark. Pat rose to his feet.

"I'll be getting along now, I think," he said in a voice which he hoped sounded casual and off-hand. "Many thanks for the meal."

"All right," said the man.

Just as Pat reached the door, the telephone bell rang, and the man went to answer it.

Once out on the road Pat breathed freely. He felt more lighthearted than at any time since leaving the island. The worst of the business was over. All he had to do now was to go to Bruceville and from there home. By to-morrow morning at latest he should be with his father. Pat could not help feeling a little proud that single-handed he had got the better of Bill and Hank and the rest. Wouldn't they be surprised to find their plans defeated? The only drawback was that they wouldn't know who had done it.

While Pat was thinking of these things, he had walked about fifty yards towards the town. Suddenly he heard a friendly shout behind him.

"Come back a minute, will you?"

The man had come out of the cottage and was strolling towards Pat.

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"Look here," he said. "I've just had a phone message. I'm going to drive into town right off, and I'll take you wherever you like."

"Oh, I can walk all right," said Pat.

"Come on. I'd like to have you along. You're not sore because I dropped the fish on your face, are you?"

"No," said Pat, "that didn't matter. I'll come."

They retraced their steps to the cottage and went in. The man closed the door and turned to Pat.

"You done pretty well for a kid," he said, with a smile.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, it was Hank on the phone."

Pat made a rush for the kitchen, but the door was closed, and before he could tear it open he was collared.

"I guess," said the man, laughing, "we'll put off our little jaunt to town. You'll be sleeping here tonight."

## CHAPTER XIII

### A Night in the Mist

The shouting and confusion which followed the shattering of the searchlight had no effect on Sandy's rowing. With swift, strong, but quiet strokes he drove the boat out into the lake. The friendly darkness wrapped them round like a black cloak. They felt wonderfully secure now that they had no longer to hide themselves from the white accusing finger of the searchlight. The dangers ahead of them seemed nothing compared with those which were dropping astern.

While Sandy was busy at the oars, Dick had been holding his hand over Tom's mouth.

"There's a time for everything," he murmured to Tom, who was far too dazed and stupid to hear him, "and this is not the time to try your high notes."

At last the noise of Bill and his men grew faint in the distance. A moment later there was silence. Apparently there was to be no pursuit. Indeed, how could there be? The first two or three minutes had been the really dangerous ones. They had come through them, and could now turn their thoughts to what lay ahead.

But not even during the first few minutes, not even

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when the searchlight had played full upon their hiding place, had fear for themselves been uppermost in the minds of Sandy and Dick. Their hearts were dancing with a new and wonderful excitement; and now at last they had a chance to speak.

"Did you hear what that brute said?" asked Sandy. "Pat Post!"

"Hear it! I should think I did. I nearly fell out of the boat. It must be old Pat. There can't be another boy mixed up with this wretched gang the way we are who is called Pat and Post."

"Yes," replied Sandy, "it's mighty queer if it isn't Pat, but it's almost as queer if it is. Those fellows certainly thought they shot him here. How does he turn up somewhere else?"

"I don't know any more than you do," said Dick. "But I bet old Pat's alive. He's a prisoner, and it's up to us to get him free."

The thought that Pat, instead of lying at the bottom of the lake with a bullet through him, was alive and needing to be rescued made them feel ready for anything. They felt that they could row all night and be as fresh as ever. A great oppressive weight had all at once been lifted off them. If they could only find Pat, all they had been through would seem no more than an ugly nightmare.

"Where are we going to head for?" asked Dick presently. "We'd better decide on something or other."

They soon agreed on one thing—that the American shore must be nearer than the Canadian, and that to

reach it they should go south. Neither Sandy nor Dick knew much about the stars, but they knew enough to find the Dipper and, from it, the North Star.

"That ought to keep us more or less right," said Sandy, "but I wish I had some idea of the distance."

"Tom ought to know," said Dick. "Let's try him."

In their excitement about Pat they had almost forgotten Tom, who still lay like a log in the bottom of the boat. Dick shook him by the shoulder, but at first with no results.

At last, however, Tom began to mutter words and broken sentences.

"Bill—money—shack burnt—drunken sailor."

"Wake up, Tom," said Dick, and dragged him up to a sitting position.

"I am awake," murmured Tom reproachfully.

"All right, listen. We've escaped from the island and we want to get to the mainland."

"Escaped from island," said Tom gravely.

"Yes; now, tell us: is the American shore very far away?"

"Far away," echoed Tom dreamily.

Dick tried another tack. He tilted up Tom's face and wet it with cold water.

"Look there. Do you see the Dipper?"

Tom showed more interest and eagerness.

"Dipper?" he said in an inquiring tone.

"Yes, Dipper. Can't you see it?"

"Hand it to me; I'm thirsty. Mouth's hot. Give me the dipper."

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Dick laid him down again.

"He's hopeless. Let's get on with the job. Do you mind if I take a turn rowing? I'm cold."

With infinite care they changed places, and Dick began pulling away, with his eye on the North Star.

For an hour or so nothing happened. From time to time they talked of Pat and their chances of finding him. Sandy had just replaced Dick at the oars when he said:

"Clouds. We'll have to trust to luck now."

He was right. In a few minutes practically all the stars were hidden, and they rowed on with the uncomfortable sensation that they might be going in a circle, or even heading back towards the island. They continued rowing, however, and felt that, if it did nothing else, it at least helped to keep them warm.

For it had begun to grow piercingly cold, and presently a damp mist rose up all about them. Compared with this clammy vapour the blackness of the night seemed a decent friendly thing. A couple of hours before they had felt ready for anything, but it was not easy to be buoyant and alert when rowing aimlessly about in the cold and bewildering whiteness. Suddenly Dick jumped nervously.

"What's that?" he said sharply to Sandy.

A high forlorn cry had pierced the mist. Twice it rose and died away. Then came a long mocking laugh—an eerie, heartless thing.

"It's only a loon, you idiot," said Sandy. "Don't get jumpy."

"Of course it is," Dick admitted in an embarrassed voice. "Sorry."

Slowly the hours wore away. They had no longer the slightest hope of getting anywhere before morning, and just rowed enough to keep themselves from being chilled through. Every little while the horrible cry and laughter of the loon broke the silence. Tom slept on peacefully.

"Don't you think," asked Sandy at last, "it's a little brighter over there?"

He pointed to his left. They watched eagerly. At first they were in doubt, but gradually the mist brightened and then thinned. A breeze sprang up, and the mist began to roll away in shreds and blotches. Finally came the radiance and warmth of the sun. The night was over. Tom began to stir and at length opened his eyes.

"Have a good sleep?" asked Sandy.

Tom grunted and sat up.

"Where are we?" he asked, looking in surprise at the boat and the lake.

"Don't you remember what happened last night, Tom?"

Tom put his hand up to his head and sat for a moment or two in silence.

"Yes. Bits of it. I had a row with Bill, didn't I?"

Sandy nodded, and Tom made further efforts to recall his adventures. At last, with the help of the boys he got the story straightened out.

"And where are we going?" he inquired.

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"To the American side, if we can get there," said Dick.

The mist had almost wholly gone now, and the breeze was freshening. They continued to row south and to keep a sharp look-out for land. All at once they noticed Tom. His head was sagging forward and an unhealthy greenish-grey colour was on his face. His drinking, the blow on the head, and the tossing of the boat had proved a deadly combination.

Tom was seasick. He did not complain much, though in answer to the boys' questions he admitted he was feeling "bad". He lay flat in the bottom and raised himself to put his head over the side when necessary. And it was frequently necessary.

"Is that land?" said Dick, pointing. Sandy turned his head. The water was dark blue, but on the horizon they both thought they saw a line of darker blue. Sandy tugged harder. In ten minutes there was no doubt. The darker blue was certainly land.

A quarter of an hour more, and the shore line was clear cut. There was no sign of houses, but the boys were in high spirits. Warmed by the morning sun, the most difficult and dangerous stage of their journey behind them, and convinced that Pat was still alive, they were eager to get on land and do something. Tom was looking better now, though badly in need of a shave.

It was not long before the boat ran up on a sandy shore. They pulled it up high and dry and looked at one another.



"What's the first thing to do?" asked Dick.

"Better hide the boat," answered Sandy. "We may need it again. You never know. And, anyway, if it's found here, it might start questions and inquiries. Our story's rather queer, and not everybody would believe it. After all, we stole the boat."

They hauled the boat up into a thick clump of willow bushes where it would probably not be detected by any casual passer-by.

"Now for some grub," said Dick. "I'm as empty as an old tin can."

The three of them turned from the water and climbed the slope. A hundred yards or so beyond ran a road, parallel with the lake shore. A wisp of blue smoke drifted past them. They looked to their left. On a shady patch of grass under an elm sat a man cooking breakfast over a little fire.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A Twisted Clothes Line

The man by the fire was a cheerful-looking fellow in comfortable and rather ragged clothes. He was frying bacon and eggs and keeping a watchful eye on a billy can which was standing by the edge of the fire and sending out a fragrant smell of coffee. He glanced rather critically at the three intruders as they came up, but appeared to decide that they were not objectionable.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "Have you had breakfast?"

"No, we haven't," said Dick, who could not help his eyes wandering to the frying pan.

"In that case, will you give me the pleasure of taking it with me? I can only offer you bacon, eggs, and coffee. Of course, there's bread too, and fresh country butter. I live simply. But if that menu suits you, sit down. I forgot to say that the cream is really excellent."

Dick hardly knew what to say. The man's way of speaking embarrassed him. He managed to stammer out their thanks, and they all sat down.

The man opened his knapsack.

"Two each?" he asked, drawing out eggs.

They nodded, and he began to break them into the pan. A moment after he added rashers of bacon.

"You see," he went on, "this is a very good part of the country. You can really get anything you like, everything from coats and shirts to chickens and fruit—if you know how to ask for things. The winters are not so easy."

Dick and Sandy looked at each other. They could not make the man out. Apparently he was a tramp, but he was unlike any other tramp they had ever met.

In a few minutes, however, they had something better to do than to puzzle themselves about their host. They were busy with bacon and eggs and coffee. Dick and Sandy felt almost ashamed of their appetites, but at last even they were more or less satisfied. When the meal was over, the man leaned back against the elm, lit a pipe and smiled contentedly.

"I suppose," he remarked, "I should have introduced myself before. My name is Charles Michael Trevelyan. Some people who know me rather well call me Mike; some others call me Fresh Air Charlie. May I ask your names?"

"This," said Sandy, "is Dick Hughes; I am Sandy Grant, and this is Tom."

"May I ask another question?" said Michael.

Sandy nodded consent.

"I should very much like to know why you hid the boat. I heard you come ashore and strolled over and

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watched you. It made me rather curious. Of course, you needn't tell me if you'd rather not."

It was not very easy to answer this. Dick and Sandy were hardly prepared to blurt out their whole story to a stranger, and yet anything less than the whole story would hardly do. They had no wish to seem suspicious characters. While they were still hesitating, Tom started to explain.

"Well now, you see, the thing of it is that really the boat belongs to Mickie. And then, too, these here boys got into trouble on the island, you see, with Bill. Not that I want to say anything against the boys. They done me a good turn, and I won't forget it. And then there's another thing. Bill owes me money, and there was a kind of row after the shack was burnt, and so I came along with the boys. But I hit Bill one good clip anyways. So that's why we buried the boat—just to be safe like."

Tom stopped. It was plain that he was rather pleased with his explanation. In his opinion everything had now been made as clear as daylight, and there was nothing more to be said.

"Thank you," said Michael, with a slight smile.

Sandy thought there was a good deal more to be said. Tom had made such a gorgeous mess of the story that Sandy at once decided there was nothing for it but to tell the whole thing from the beginning. After all, they had done nothing to be ashamed of, and Michael was, it seemed, kindly disposed towards them. Indeed, he might prove a useful ally.

"Let me tell you all about it," he began, and at the end of ten minutes Michael knew about the *Scud*, the island, and all the rest of it.

"What we must do now," Sandy wound up, "is to find Pat."

"Have you any idea where he is?" asked Michael.

"None at all. What's more, we don't even know where we ourselves are."

"That point's soon settled," said Michael, drawing a very crinkled paper from his pocket.

He spread it out on the ground, and the boys found that it was a road map.

"We're sitting just about there," said Michael, putting his finger on a point on the coast line.

"Now, Tom," said Sandy. "Here's where we need you. Where does Bill's yacht usually come in?"

Tom had already made one great intellectual effort. He was hardly ready yet for another. For a time he stared at the map, scratched his head, and slowly spelled out the names. It was no good trying to hurry him.

"There," he said at last. "That's the nearest town—Marston it's called."

The boys leaned eagerly over the map.

"Why, it's only about twenty miles from here," said Sandy. "Do you think that's where they've got Pat, Tom?"

"Might be," said Tom. "Hard to say. They've got a lot of holes and corners."

"Well, full speed ahead for Marston," said Dick. "We'll try it first."

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He jumped to his feet, and so did Sandy. They turned to Michael to thank him for the breakfast and to say good-bye. But he began to gather his few things together.

"Do you mind if I come with you?" he asked. "I might as well go that way as any other, for, as Bill says in one of his books:

' And when I wander here and there  
I then do most go right.'

And, besides, I like company, when it's of the right sort."

Off they set. Dick and Sandy were so impatient to get to a place where they might hear of Pat that they found the pace rather slow. But Tom was inclined to lag, and acted as a constant brake on the party.

"Come on, Thomas," said Michael; "remember what Bill says:

' Jog on, jog on, the footpath way,  
And merrily hent the stile-a:  
A merry heart goes all the day,  
Your sad tires in a mile-a '."

"Bill! Who's this Bill you're talking about?" said Tom. "I only know one Bill, and he never said nothing like that."

"Oh, I don't mean your friend Bill who owes you money. This is a different person. Bill Shakespeare's his name—and a very good friend of mine."

Tom grunted.

"Your friend may be all right, but if he'd had a bash on the head from Mickie and then been seasick half the night, he wouldn't talk about going all day. My heart's not sad, but my head's mighty sore."

"All right, Thomas," answered Michael soothingly, "we won't hurry you."

They kept going for over four hours, Tom complaining at intervals.

"We must be getting somewhere near Marston now," said Sandy.

"Yes," said Tom, "about five miles more. But I've just been thinking that's not where we should go first. Bill's got a shack nearer here, and they might keep the kid there."

As they went on, Tom kept on the watch for familiar landmarks. Sandy and Dick grew more and more excited. At last Tom halted.

"Here we are," he said, and pointed to a path on the left side of the road. "Follow me, and don't make a noise. Maybe Bill or some of the others are here."

Very slowly Tom moved forward among the trees and bushes. Presently he stopped, crouched down, and pointed ahead. Fifty yards in front was a shack. They were separated from it only by a thin screen of bushes. The door was shut, and the whole place was silent.

"This is where they usually land the stuff," whispered Tom.

They lay for a while, staring at the closed door.

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What did it hide from them? Was Pat a prisoner behind it? Was anybody else there?

Finally Michael, Dick, and Sandy advanced. Tom stayed in hiding. It would not do for him to be seen. The others walked forward quite openly. They knocked at the door and received no answer. They knocked again, and then tried the handle. The door was locked.

"Pat," called Dick, but his voice did not start even an echo.

They moved round the shack and stared in at a window. All they saw was a bare interior—two or three chairs and a table—no sign of a human being. They had drawn a blank. After they had rejoined Tom, Sandy turned to Michael.

"What do you think we should do? Keep watch here?"

"That's probably worth doing," answered Michael. "But there's another thing worth doing too. You know, it was about seven o'clock when we began walking, and now it's about twelve. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have dinner."

Tom's interest was at once aroused.

"Where are we going to get it?" he asked.

"That's easy enough. Come on, Sandy. Dick and Tom better stay here to keep an eye on things."

Michael and Sandy came out on the road again, and moved on towards Marston. Sandy's thoughts were on Pat, and he did not feel talkative. All at once he was roused from his brooding by Michael jogging his arm.

"Here's our chance for dinner. Come on."



Sandy looked up. They were coming to a farm house. Behind it were two clothes lines, stretching from the back of the house to the top of a high pole. The lines, half full of clothes which were dancing madly in the wind, had become twisted together. Below them stood a woman looking up and very plainly enraged and helpless. But Sandy could not see how a pair of clothes lines, however badly tangled, were to help them to a dinner. However, he followed his companion.

They went round to the back of the house and approached the distressed lady. She looked sharply round on hearing their footsteps.

"Well, what do you want?" she snapped. "I've enough trouble without being bothered by tramps and beggars."

Michael took off his hat and bowed.

"We saw your difficulties, madam, and took the liberty of coming in. I hope you will allow us to help you."

In spite of herself the woman looked less cross.

"I am in trouble," she admitted. "It was all right till the wind got up. Now the lines are all messed. I can't get the clothes on or off; and one wire is off the wheel at the top of the pole; and my husband in town for the day, and a hundred things to attend to in the house. I like to get the washing over long before this. This has been my bad day, as sure as my name's Martha Bales."

"Have you got a ladder, madam?" asked Michael.

"Yes; in the barn."

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"We'll have your lines fixed in a moment."

In a couple of minutes the ladder was up. Michael mounted, and Sandy held the lower end steady. After a quarter of an hour the lines were disentangled and both running smoothly on their wheels. Michael climbed down.

"Well, I'm sure," said Martha. "I'm obliged to you, and I suppose I shouldn't have been so cranky when you came in. But we're bothered so much with tramps and folk like that here. Why, it's only a few days ago we had a boy come here—just a youngster he was, no older than that boy there," she pointed to Sandy—"and what a story he told about coming over from Canada in some boat or other he didn't know the name of. My husband's got far too soft a heart. He gave the boy a day's work, and a pair of boots, and two good meals. I think he'd have let him sleep here, if I hadn't sent him about his business. If I'd had my way, I'd have put the dog on him at the beginning."

"Quite right too," said Michael emphatically. "I hope he won't come round bothering you again."

"Oh, he won't do that. He's back in Canada, where he belongs. At least I know he got on a boat, because there was a great row about him at the docks. He picked up some decent harmless man and threw him in the water, I believe. My husband was in town that day and heard all about it. I expect to see the young villain's name in the paper some day soon. He'll be up for robbery, or bootlegging, or something. You mark my words. He was called Pat Stephens. At least

he said he was, but that may have been a lie. You never can tell. A shameless young good-for-nothing he was."

"I don't know what young people are coming to nowadays," said Michael in a sympathetic voice. "Indeed I don't. And the girls are as bad as the boys. They'll never be like their mothers. They'll never do a day's washing like that," and he pointed to the clothes line. "But we must not take up any more of your time, madam. You see, four of us are camping back there a bit, and this boy and I are just walking in to Marston to get something for dinner."

"What were you going to get?" asked the woman.

"Oh, some beef or a chicken. We were planning a big spread to-day. One of the boys is having a birthday."

"Not a step farther do you go," declared Martha. "I have a chicken all ready cleaned and you're certainly welcome to it. You've saved my day for me."

"You're far too kind," said Michael. "We couldn't think of taking a chicken."

"Nonsense! If I can't give you one of my own chickens it's a funny business."

She bustled off into the house, and Michael smiled at Sandy.

"Do you like fried chicken?" he asked.

Sandy had no thoughts to spare even for fried chicken.

"Did you hear what she said about Pat?" he said excitedly.

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Before Michael could reply Martha was out of the house again with two parcels.

“Here you are,” she said, “and, though I do say it as shouldn’t, it’s a nice plump one. And be careful of this other parcel,” handing it to Sandy; “it’s eggs and a cake.”

## CHAPTER XV

### A Matter of Spelling

Once he felt the man's hands on his collar, Pat knew it was hopeless to struggle. After a moment or two his captor released him, and Pat sat down. He felt suddenly weak and helpless. His whole scheme had tumbled down like a house of cards, and he thought bitterly of the chances he had thrown away. Why had he come into the cottage at all? And, above all, why, when once he had got out again, had he not taken to his heels? By now he could have been half a mile on the way to town or safely hidden. He had come triumphantly through all the most difficult part of his adventure, only to fail when the road to safety was wide open before him. Five minutes before he had been patting himself on the back; now he sat with drooping head and shoulders calling himself every hard name he could think of.

"Cheer up, kid. You nearly brought it off. You never thought about the phone, eh? Good thing I asked you in."

Pat did not answer. Indeed, he scarcely heard what was said.

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"Look here," the man went on, "what's your game anyhow? Did you swipe the dope Hank was to bring over?"

"No," said Pat, looking up. "I did not."

"Well, how did you get the better of Hank on the *Irene*? He didn't tell me much. There wasn't time. You'd have got clear away if I'd stopped to ask questions."

At first Pat said nothing to this. He thought that the less information he gave the better. They did not know that he was aware of the plot against his father, although he was afraid they would guess he did. They must know that he had heard the talk about the dollar bill, and they would argue that he had probably heard other things. Still, the less he appeared to know the better it would be for his plans. All this flashed through his mind in a couple of seconds.

"I wanted to get across; that's all," he said.

The man grunted. His question had not been answered, and he was plainly convinced that Pat was keeping something back.

"Well, if that's all you wanted, you've got it. Here you are. Free board and lodging, too, till further orders."

There was not much more talk that night. Pat sat brooding, and his companion smoked silently and cheerfully, spitting at regular intervals with great skill into a cuspidor. The only interruption was caused by the telephone ringing.

"That you, Hank? Oh, yes. I've got him. You

were just in time, though. All right. You bet."

He came away from the telephone, and turning to Pat with a grin said:

"Hank sends you his love. He says I'm to take good care of you."

About ten o'clock the man locked both front and back doors, and put the keys in his pocket.

"You can sleep on the floor or with me," he said to Pat. "Which do you want?"

"The floor," said Pat.

"You're very particular, you are. All right, but remember—no monkey work. You can't get out, and it's no use trying. If you do try, I'll tie you up. So don't be a fool; and I'll tell you one thing, boy: I'm a mighty light sleeper."

With that the man turned out the lamp and threw himself on the bed. It was not long before he was placidly snoring. But Pat, though tired enough not to notice the hardness of the floor, was far from sleep. He lay on his back and thought with fear of his father's danger and with rage of his own helplessness. As time went on, he grew more and more rebellious. He could not resign himself to inactivity, to quiet acceptance of his position. Something or other he must try. But what? Both doors were locked, and the keys were in his gaoler's pocket.

The room was not wholly dark. Across Pat's legs lay a pale band of moonlight, and it was this which gave him his plan. If the doors were locked, what about a window? There were, Pat remembered, two of them

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—the one through which the moonlight was streaming, and one in the kitchen.

For a few minutes longer Pat lay listening to the man's snoring. Then he slowly sat up and turned back the blanket. Getting to his feet was a more ticklish business. One of the floor boards creaked, but the snoring went on undisturbed.

Pat decided to try the near window first. True, he was nearer his captor than he would be in the kitchen, but then, the chances of making a noise in tiptoeing the whole length of the room were too great.

Three stealthy steps, and Pat was at the window. Very gently he tried to raise it, but it would not budge. Then Pat noticed that it was held down by a nail. This he grasped and began to pull. At first it seemed hopelessly firm, but gradually Pat felt it loosen. After about five minutes tugging and wiggling Pat at last drew it out.

Now for the window. Once more he began to press upwards. For an instant nothing happened, and then, as Pat used a little more strength, up went the window with a rush and a bang.

"Admiring the view?" drawled a voice from the bed. "I've been watching you for two or three minutes. Moonlight's sort of romantic, ain't it? I used to feel that way myself when I was a kid. But what about going back to bed? Youngsters need lots of sleep."

The man got up and lit the lamp. In a corner of the room he picked up a length of rope, and walked up to Pat, who had scarcely moved since raising the window.



"This'll keep you from disturbing other people," said the fellow, as he tied Pat's hands behind his back. "Now, lie down, you young fool, and stay there."

Again the lamp was extinguished, and again both lay down. This time, in spite of the discomfort of his bonds and the disgust he felt at his failure, Pat at last fell asleep.

The first sound he heard was that of the kitchen stove being lighted. He got to his feet, feeling stiff and tired.

"Good morning. Hungry?"

"Yes," answered Pat curtly.

The man at once loosened Pat's hands, and presently they sat down to breakfast.

After the meal Bob—he told Pat that that was his name—made a suggestion.

"You seem a decent sort of kid—though you did try your funny work last night—and I don't want to keep you shut up here like a tame rabbit. You can come and work in the garden if you promise not to bolt. If you don't want to promise, I'll lock you in. What do you say?"

Pat thought for a while before deciding. He hated to give a promise, but, after all, he was not really losing any opportunity for gaining freedom. With both doors locked and with Bob just outside the house there was no hope of escaping.

"All right," he said finally, "I'll promise for the morning."

"Come along then," said Bob, "and in case you forget your promise I'll take this." He picked up a .22

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rifle, and out they went to the patch of garden beside the house.

As Pat worked along the rows of vegetables with the hoe, the whole business seemed to him absurdly unreal. Bob and he talked together from time to time in a friendly enough way. A few yards away motors were humming past. He seemed to all appearances as free as daylight, and yet he was as much a prisoner as if he had been lying trussed up behind locked doors and barred windows.

In the middle of the morning Bob went into the house, and Pat was left alone in the garden. The idea of a dash for freedom rushed into his mind. In a moment he could have hidden; in two or three minutes he might be in a friendly motor headed for Bloxton. He had given his word not to escape. That was true, but surely, if by breaking his promise he could save his father, he ought to break it without a moment's hesitation. So Pat told himself, but somehow he did not take to his heels. He stayed where he was, torn between two motives and wretchedly unhappy, and was still standing there when Bob came out of the house. Pat was almost glad to see him. The decision had been taken out of his hands.

Dinner came and was followed by a monotonous afternoon and evening. Pat slept on the floor again. The next day was a Sunday and rainy, and Pat wandered about the room, looking for something to divert his thoughts from his father and from Sandy and Dick. There were no books in the place except a couple of



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HANK DID THE RUBING, AND DID IT WITH MAJESTIC PLEASURE

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movie magazines, but there was a radio which Bob said he was welcome to use. He tinkered with it for a while and listened to part of a sermon on all the blessings for which we should be thankful. But at the moment Pat did not feel that his blessings were very abundant, and he took the ear-phones off in disgust.

The most interesting thing he hit upon was a map of the district hanging upon the wall between the front room and kitchen. The *Irene* had put into Bruceville. Pat knew it well and had often been there, and he knew also that barely fifteen miles to the north was Bloxton. Yes, there it was on the map. Only fifteen miles from his father, and yet, as Pat reflected bitterly, it might just as well be fifteen hundred, for all he could do. And there running through Bloxton was a wriggly black line. That was the river which they had glided down on board the *Scud* only a few days earlier. Pat could hardly believe that it was only a few days; months at least seemed to have passed. With his eye Pat followed down the course of the stream. Just there, he thought, near the mouth was that old brickyard where they had run into the strange yacht and the rough-spoken men. He remembered how light-heartedly he had recorded the business in his diary. The little book was still in his pocket, but he was in no mood for scribbling entries. And, as he thought of that encounter at the brickyard, something dawned on him. Those fellows who had come to the island and who now held him prisoner must be the same as the men at the brickyard. He wondered it had not occurred to him

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before. He remembered now that Bill's voice had sounded vaguely familiar. For a moment he was excited by his information, but, after all, he was forced to admit that the information did not help him much. And back went his thoughts to his father and to Sandy and Dick.

"Monday's wash day," said Bob the next morning. "What about a swim?"

Again he exacted a promise from Pat to make no attempt at escape, and together they went down to the shore. Bob washed not only himself, but also some shirts. It was hard to say which needed it more. Pat followed his example. His shirt had become indescribably filthy, and the smell of pike slime still clung to it. When they came back to the cottage, Pat hung his shirt up in the kitchen.

"Better hang it over here with mine," said Bob; "it'll be in the way there when I'm cooking."

He took Pat's shirt off the line and was just about to hang it up in the new place when something seemed to catch his eye. He stared at the neckband for a moment, but then hung it up without saying anything. About an hour or so after dinner he turned to Pat and said in an offhand way:

"Do you spell your name with a V or a Ph?"

"Ph," said Pat, and the next instant could have bitten his tongue off.

Bob laughed.

"Caught you napping that time. So your name is Stephens not Post. Same as Jim Stephens, eh? And

now I think of it, I remember a bit in the paper about Pat Stephens and two other kids going off on a sailing trip. That would be you, I guess. That's how you got to the States, I suppose. And now you're taking a hand at your dad's game."

Pat said not a word. What had happened was only too clear. Bob had seen the name on the shirt. Pat remembered how carefully his mother had marked all his clothes before he had started on the trip. "It may help you," she had said, "to bring back some of your own things, instead of a mixture of Sandy's and Dick's."

"I don't know your father," went on Bob, "but we've met him more than once in a business way, so to speak," and again he laughed. "Smart fellow Jim is; right on the job. But maybe he'll be taking things a bit easier soon."

Pat still remained silent. He wondered if Bob's last remark had any reference to the plot; and, if so, what did "soon" mean? For three precious days now Pat had lain idle and powerless. A couple more days, and it might be too late to do anything. For all he knew, it might be already too late.

The next day dragged past without anything happening. The following afternoon the telephone rang, and Bob answered it.

"Thought I'd be hearing from you soon. To-night? In the yard? Nine o'clock. All right."

Bob hung up the receiver.

"Friend of yours coming to see you to-night," he said quietly to Pat.

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The rest of the day seemed intolerably long. Who was coming and what the visit meant he did not know, but he could not help feeling that matters were drawing to a head. Something was going to happen and happen soon. More than ever he chafed against his inactivity and impotence.

Supper came, and soon afterwards the hands of the clock crawled round to eight. The last hour appeared endless. Almost on the stroke of nine a car stopped in front of the cottage; the door was thrust open, and a man entered. It was Hank.

Bob and he exchanged greetings. Then Hank turned to Pat.

"Thought you were pretty smart, didn't you? Well, it's our turn now. Perhaps next time you'll mind your own business."

"It's more of the kid's business than you think, Hank," interposed Bob.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Tell you later. Let's be off."

"All right," said Hank. "What are you going to do with the young idiot?"

"Oh, leave him here. We can fix him up."

"Got any rope?" asked Hank.

In a couple of minutes Pat's ankles were bound tightly together, and his wrists tied behind his back. Hank did the roping and did it with malicious pleasure. The bonds were drawn so tight that Pat had to clench his teeth to keep himself from screaming out with the pain.



“ Better gag the brat too,” said Hank. “ He might lie here and howl for help.”

A filthy handkerchief was thrust into Pat’s mouth and secured there by a band knotted behind his head. When he had finished the job, Hank picked up the boy and threw him on to Bob’s bed.

“ Come on,” he said. “ Mustn’t keep Bill waiting. His temper’s raw to-night, and you know what he is at the best of times. There’s a lot of work ahead of us.”

Bob locked the back door and turned out the lamp. Both men went out. Pat heard the key grate in the front door and then the sound of the car starting.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Dick hears Good News

If Michael had shown skill in getting a dinner, he showed no less in cooking it. Every bone of Martha's chicken was picked clean.

But, though the boys were grateful to her for the best meal they had had since leaving home, they were still more grateful for the news about Pat. Sandy told Dick with great glee her opinion of Pat's character and her story of his violence on the boat.

"Now let's put two and two together," he went on. "Last night we heard Bill say they had Pat a prisoner, and now we know that a few days ago Pat was free and crossed to Canada."

"You mean he's a prisoner over there?" asked Dick. Sandy nodded.

"Yes. The question is where?"

"Where'd they be likely to keep him, Tom?"

But Tom was no help. After a long walk and a large meal he was not much awake in either mind or body.

"I dunno," he answered in a sleepy voice.

"The best thing we can do," said Dick, "is to follow Pat across and go to his father. He'll have to

know what's happened anyway, and he should be able to do something, if anybody can."

"How do you intend to cross?" asked Michael.

"I hardly know," said Sandy. "We'll have to wangle it somehow."

"Why not take a sidedoor pullman?" suggested Michael.

"Pullman! Why, we've no money even for an ordinary daycoach. You see, we had hardly any cash with us on the trip, because we bought all our supplies before starting. What we did bring was in Pat's pocket. He was to be treasurer and to keep the accounts."

"I said a sidedoor pullman," said Michael. "They're not very expensive. I always go that way myself."

"A sidedoor pullman," repeated Dick. "What's that?"

"Freight car."

"But they don't take passengers."

"Not always," said Michael, "but they often do. The only difference between a sidedoor pullman and an ordinary one is that the conductor doesn't know you're on. It's very simple and quite comfortable. No fuss about tickets. I'll put you on board."

Sandy and Dick did not hesitate long. The need of getting across was imperative, and they saw no other way of doing it.

"When can we go?" asked Sandy.

"Oh, more or less any time. Probably to-night."

"Let's start," said Dick, jumping to his feet. Tom very reluctantly stood up with the others.

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"If you boys are crossing, guess I'll go along," he said. "I belong over there."

They swung off briskly on the road to Marston. By the time they reached the railway yard in the little town it was dusk.

"I've never got on board here," said Michael. "I'll have to find out what the chances are. Just wait here a minute or two."

He wandered off among the freight sheds, and after a few minutes came back smiling.

"Everything's all right," he announced. "Come along."

They followed him past a row of sheds.

"There's the message I got," he remarked.

"Message? Where? What do you mean?" asked the boys.

Michael pointed to the end of a shed. On the boards near the ground was a small drawing in chalk of a policeman's face with one eye shut.

"What does that mean?"

"That they're ready to wink at things. Now for our pullman. What's the place you want to go to? Bloxton?"

"Yes."

Michael led the way along and across railway tracks, stopping from time to time to look at the little cards fastened to the side of freight cars. At last he stopped.

"This one's for Bloxton," he said. "You'd better hop in."

Nobody was near. The big sliding door was soon

opened. Tom and the boys climbed into the dark car, empty except for a few crates.

"I'll be back in a little while," said Michael, and vanished.

For about a quarter of an hour they sat waiting. All at once Michael, barely visible in the growing darkness, poked his head in.

"She pulls out to-night sometime. You'll get in to-morrow evening. I hope you'll be comfortable. Good luck."

Dick and Sandy jumped forward to thank him and to say good-bye, but he cut their words short.

"Thank the railway company. You're their guests. Good-bye. Be sure and find Pat. Farewell, Thomas. Get that money out of Bill."

He waved his hand, closed the door, and slipped away.

They lay down in a corner of the car, and it was not long before Tom was sleeping peacefully. Dick and Sandy were too much on edge to follow his example at once. Their whispered talk, however, at length trailed off into silence. Suddenly they were roused by a jolt, severe enough to waken even Tom for a moment. The train had started.

More than once in the course of the night they found themselves awake. They did not know what time it was, nor where they were, but they trusted that every bump was bringing them nearer home.

Day, when it came, did not very much lessen the darkness inside the car. A few dim beams straggled in,

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just enough to tell them that night was over. The hours crawled past, and the air grew hot and close. For food they had a couple of raw eggs each and some cake—the remnants of Martha's gift.

When, for about the hundredth time, they were speculating as to their whereabouts, the brakes suddenly went on with a grinding noise, and the train stopped. But it had stopped so often already that they thought nothing of that.

"Perhaps we're there," said Dick languidly.

All at once the door was dragged open. It was dusk outside. Two men quickly climbed in, and boxes and bundles were handed in to them. A moment afterwards the inevitable happened. One of the men caught sight of them.

"Here you!" he said roughly. "Clear out!"

They jumped out on to the platform, bewildered by the suddenness with which things had happened. The train rumbled off, and they were left staring blankly at one another.

"I don't know the name of this hole," said Sandy, "but it isn't Bloxton."

"We can't be far away," said Dick. "Michael said we'd get there in the evening."

A man at the far end of the platform looked at them with idle curiosity.

"How far to Bloxton?" asked Dick, going up to him.

"By road?"

"Yes."

"Maybe fifteen miles. That's the road there."

"Thanks," said Dick. "Got the time?"

"About eight."

Dick went back with the information.

"Four hours' good walking," said Sandy. "We'll be there by midnight, and we may get a lift."

The road was winding and dusty; and they were stiff and hungry. But the feeling that they were on the last lap and the prospect of rescuing Pat put liveliness into their stride. At least it enlivened Dick and Sandy; Tom was not very excited. To him a fifteen-mile walk was not a thing to be taken lightheartedly.

Just before it was dark Sandy halted and pointed to the left.

"Now I know where we are, Dick. See that hill with the row of pines on it? That's old Turner's place. There's the windmill, too. We must be near the river."

"So it is," said Dick.

They broke into a trot. After a few hundred yards they stopped at a cross roads. Sandy was right. In front of them lay the river valley. Dick seized Sandy's shoulder.

"Look! The old brick-yard."

It was about a half-mile downstream. They were able to discern the outlines of the kilns and of the high chimney. But these were not the things which held their gaze. Their eyes were fastened on a yacht moored to the tumbledown wharf.

At once their thoughts jumped back to the first night of the cruise. Here was the *Dart* again. For a

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little while neither of them spoke. Each knew the question that was in the other's mind. Should they continue on the Bloxton road, or take the other one down the hill and across the river? Might they not find Pat at the yard, set him free, and go home triumphant—the three of them together?

Unnoticed by the boys Tom had come up and was standing just behind them. His slow voice broke the silence.

"Looks as if Bill was there to-night," he said, looking downstream at the yacht.

"Do you think they'd have Pat there?" asked Sandy.

"Might. Quite likely."

That settled it. Without any discussion the three of them turned to the left and began to go downhill. They crossed the bridge and struck off on the road to the yard.

They had just proceeded a few yards when Dick uttered an exclamation.

"Wait a jiffy! I've got a scheme. If the whole gang's there we can't do much to help Pat. I'll nip up right away to Turner's place and phone Pat's father. I'll tell him to come here with his men."

He looked eagerly at Sandy.

"That's the stuff," said Sandy, "and while you're away Tom and I'll keep an eye on things here. You'd better come and see where we're going to be posted."

They went forward cautiously, but as quickly as they dared. At last the dark wall of the kiln loomed up ahead.



"Dick," whispered Sandy, "that's the old brick wall. You remember the place, don't you?"

Dick nodded.

"See the two little cracks of light near the ground? It's shining through the old furnace doors. Tom and I'll go as near the one on the left as it's safe to go. Now run for all you're worth."

Dick was off like a flash. Often on hikes the boys had been at Turner's farm, and the darkness did not slacken Dick's speed. In a few minutes he was knocking at the door. Mrs. Turner opened it.

"Why, bless me, Dick! We haven't seen you for ages. Come in. Are you camping out for a few days?"

"No," panted Dick, who was still out of breath after his run. "Not exactly. May I use your phone?"

"Of course you may."

She showed him into the front room, where old Turner in his shirt sleeves was smoking and reading. He nodded in a friendly way to Dick.

In a couple of moments Dick was blurting out his message to Mrs. Stephens.

"But, Dick," she said, "what's all the trouble? Pat rang up about an hour ago and wanted his father. Mr. Stephens has just left for the brickyard. He left not more than a minute ago."

"All right. Thank you. Good-bye," said Dick, feeling half-dazed.

Thoughts were chasing madly through his head. Pat had rung up his mother. Then Pat was free. But where was he? What an idiot he had been not to ask

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Mrs. Stephens! Well, there was no time to ring up again. Things would straighten themselves out presently.

"Anything wrong?" asked Turner, who had heard Dick at the telephone and who saw his puzzled look.

"Oh no," said Dick slowly. "Good-bye. I must be off. Thanks ever so much."

"Something queer about that boy to-night," said Turner to his wife, as the door closed behind Dick.

Dick's way back to the brickyard was downhill, and his heart was singing. Rough ground, ruts, stones—nothing lessened his head-long pace. What had happened he did not understand, but two things he did know, and they were enough. Pat was free, and in a few minutes Bill and his gang would be prisoners.

## CHAPTER XVII

### Pat changes his Plans

For a few minutes Pat lay on the bed dazed by the swift and unexpected turn of events. It seemed but a moment since Hank had shoved the door open, and now Pat was unable to use his hands, unable to walk, unable even to speak.

At first in a dull confused way and then by degrees more clearly Pat began to think of the remarks which had passed between Hank and Bob. What had Bob meant by saying that the night's work concerned Pat? That could refer to one thing only—the plot against Pat's father. To-night they must be making the arrangements. Perhaps, indeed, the plot was to be carried out in the next few hours.

In vain Pat tried to loosen his feet and his hands. With no more success he endeavoured to get rid of the hateful gag. But, though his efforts were futile, he could not bear to lie still when he thought of his father's terrible danger.

He sat up, swung his legs out of the bed, and stood. A moment later he lost his balance and fell with a crash. Again he sat up, and then shifted himself till his back

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was against the bed. With some difficulty he once more got upon his feet.

He had thought of a plan.

With short jumps he made his way towards the door leading to the kitchen. In the darkness he could not, of course, see whether it was open or shut. As a matter of fact, it was standing half open. On his sixth hop Pat's toes struck it sharply, and it slammed to. He reached it in three more hops, and then turned his back to it, and felt for the handle.

His hands were just too low down to grasp it. Try as he would, Pat could not raise them sufficiently. When he stood on tiptoe he could feel the handle on his wrists just above the rope. In vain he tried to wedge it between them firmly enough to enable him to turn it.

Pat leaned against the door and thought. What he did next needed some pluck. He raised himself as high as he could on his toes, and fell forward. If his scheme failed, he would go on his face. Up over the handle slipped his wrists, and the next instant gave Pat his chance. His fingers at last were high enough to grip the handle and wrench it round. The door was open.

Pat turned round and hopped into the kitchen. He knew where the things were, and a few jumps brought him to the table. He turned his back to it and pulled the drawer open a few inches. There he found what he was looking for—a knife.

But to cut his bonds with it was another matter

altogether. By delicate manœuvring Pat found that he could lay the edge of the blade on the rope, but he was powerless to press it, or to saw it up and down against the strands.

For a moment or two Pat stood there, with the knife held loosely in his hands. To have got so far on the road to freedom and to be halted there was a state of things Pat had no intention of accepting, but that did nothing to solve the pressing problem, how was he to cut that beastly rope?

He shoved the table firmly back against the wall. Then, holding the blade in his fingers, he put the knife handle into one of the front corners of the drawer. When that was done, he slowly and carefully closed the drawer. The knife was caught and held, its blade pointing upwards, between the drawer and the edge of the table. Now Pat turned at right angles to the table, and, while pressing the drawer tightly, started to rub the rope against the knife. Of course it was not long before Pat, in his eagerness, pressed a little too hard. The knife jumped out of the drawer and fell with a clatter on the floor.

Retrieving the knife and placing it once more in position was a slow business, but Pat felt that he had made a beginning and that he could free himself in time.

Once again he began to saw at the rope, and this time the knife was more firmly wedged in the drawer. Pat could not be sure, but he thought the blade was beginning to grip and cut. In his eagerness he exerted

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a little extra pressure, with the result that again the knife fell to the floor.

Barely had he got to work again, however, when all doubt as to his success disappeared. The rope suddenly gave. His wrists were loose, and a moment later free. In a second or two the knife did for his feet what it had so slowly done for his hands. Finally he wrenched the band off his face and drew the filthy gag out of his mouth, meanwhile stretching his aching limbs and grinning with joy.

But Pat did not waste time in congratulating himself. He was far too well aware that every minute was precious. He groped about near the stove, found the matches, and lit the lamp. He then paused just long enough for a drink of water to freshen his mouth after the foulness of the gag.

Pat turned towards the back door. Bob had left the key in the lock. In a flash it was turned, and the door stood wide open. The fresh night air was hardly cool on Pat's flushed face when a new idea occurred to him. His original plan had been very simple—to reach his father at Bloxton with all the speed he might and warn him of his danger. But now a more ambitious and daring scheme had swiftly taken shape in his mind.

Pat's eyes flashed as he considered the dramatic possibilities of the new idea, its thrill and the element of surprise it held, if only it did not miscarry. He decided to risk it.

Three words had suggested it—words spoken by

Bob to Hank over the telephone. At the time they were uttered Pat had scarcely heeded them. They had seemed of no concern to him. But now they rushed back upon his memory full of a new meaning. The words were: "In the yard." Pat had suddenly realized that the yard must mean the old brick-yard. It was there, then, that Bill and his gang were meeting.

As this knowledge flashed upon him Pat conceived the plan of rounding up the gang. He knew that a road turned off the main highway between Bruceville and Bloxton and crossed the river only a short distance upstream from the brickyard. He had travelled it more than once. His eyes flew to the clock. Twenty-five minutes to ten. He had freed himself in less than half an hour. With luck it was not yet too late to surprise Bill and his fellow-thugs.

Pat turned to the telephone, and as he lifted off the receiver his hand shook with excitement. So did his voice when he said:

"I want to speak to Mr. James Stephens of Bloxton."

"What is your number?"

Pat hurriedly looked at the telephone, found the number marked on a card, and gave it.

"All right. Hang up. We'll call you presently."

There was nothing for it but to wait. But the inactivity was not easy. Pat sat staring at the face of the clock in an agony of impatience. His suspense was finally ended by a loud ring.

"Hello," said Pat.

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" You calling Mr. Stephens of Bloxton?"

" Yes."

" He's not in. Will anybody else do?"

" Yes. Mrs. Stephens."

" All right. Just a moment. There you are."

Then Pat heard his mother's voice.

" Hello. Is that you, mother?"

" Why, Pat! Where are you? We didn't expect you back for ever so long."

" I can't explain now. Where's father?"

" He's gone out in the car. Some business or other. I don't know what it is. I expect him in very soon."

" Please give him a message. It's awfully important. Tell him to come with all the men he can to the old brick-yard down the river; to come at once. Do you understand, mother? I know it sounds awfully queer and fearfully sudden. But I'll tell you all about everything later. Don't worry, and make dad hustle. Good-bye."

Pat hung up the receiver, and rushed for the back door. It was just a quarter to ten. As he came out of the house, the sight of the garage made him pause and consider.

" Bob offered me a lift before. I think I'll take it now," he said to himself.

The garage door was not locked, and in a moment Pat was looking at a Ford car. To start the engine and back out on to the road was the work of only a few seconds.

The moon was just beginning to rise as Pat swung



north. The road was fairly good, though there were occasional deep ruts. Pat knew that to drive safely at a moderate speed was to throw away his chances of getting to the brick-yard in time.

The car rattled and jumped as Pat increased the speed from twenty to thirty, and then from thirty to thirty-five. Twice at sudden turnings he missed a head-on collision by inches and heard curses shouted after him. But he did not slow up.

It was not long before he turned off to the left. The new road was much more heavily rutted, but it was also less travelled. Pat argued that one thing fairly balanced another and kept up his speed.

But not for long. All at once the car seemed to lose its power. A moment later the engine gave a dying kick, and the wheels stopped turning. A couple of seconds before the car had been full of swift throbbing life; now it was dead as mutton. Pat leaped out without hesitation.

"No more gas," he exclaimed in disgust, and immediately took to his heels.

After about ten minutes, just when he was wondering whether a sharp jabbing stitch in his side was going to force him to a spell of walking, he found himself going down hill. Pat knew the place. The river was only a couple of hundred yards ahead. Presently the road swerved sharply to the right, and there, in front of him, was the bridge and the moonlit water.

Pat raced over the bridge. Just on the other side a rough overgrown road-way turned off to the left. Pat

took it, but proceeded more cautiously. He knew that the brick-yard was not far ahead. The moon was now high enough to show the outline of objects with some distinctness.

After about a quarter of a mile Pat came out on a place clear of trees and bushes. There in front of him clear in the moonlight, were the dark masses of the deserted and half-ruined kilns, and rising above all the great high chimney. He crept nearer and nearer, till all at once his eye caught a glimmer of light.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Who goes There?

Pat had never before been in the brick-yard at night, but he had been there often enough in daytime to know his way about. Noiselessly but steadily he advanced, his eyes fixed on the glimmer of light. It was only a foot or two above the ground and appeared to shine through a crack or chink.

The sound of voices brought Pat to an abrupt halt. About twenty yards ahead was a brick wall which showed less sign of ruin and decay than any other part of the brick-yard. Pat knew it well, for behind it he and Dick and Sandy had often taken shelter when bad weather had caught them on one of their hikes. Along the bottom of this wall was a line of little doors which had opened into furnaces in the days when the brick-yard had been in use. Two of these doors, perhaps fifteen yards apart, were slightly open, and it was through the cracks that the dim light showed.

Pat at once resolved to creep up to one of the little doors and from that post of vantage to see and hear what he could. Dropping on his hands and knees, he crawled forward over rough ground which was strewn

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pretty thickly with broken bricks. The sound of voices on the other side grew more and more distinct.

At last Pat reached the wall, and cautiously peeped through the crack. The little door was about three inches open, and Pat had a fairly clear view. The place had a roof of sorts, but many boards were missing or broken. The moonlight streamed through, and the scene was further lighted by a lantern. Some men were sitting in a circle on the ground. Hank and Bob Pat recognized at once. He had not had a good look at Bill since their first encounter when the rowboat containing Bill and Tom had scraped some paint off the *Scud*. But Pat had no difficulty in picking him out—a thick-lipped, sneering fellow, with a cigar in the corner of his mouth and a fat paunch. Pat looked round at the remaining men. There were six of them, all ordinary-looking toughs. Bill was talking, and it was quite clear both from his appearance and voice that he was three parts drunk.

“And I’m just as glad we’re not bothered with that fool Tom. He’d only have been a nuisance. Lucky he don’t know anything about what we’re going to do to Stephens, or he’d have blabbed it to those two kids. As it is, he hasn’t enough brains to get us into trouble.”

Bill stopped to pull at his cigar and to spit. What he said had startled Pat. Could the two kids be Sandy and Dick? Who was Tom? Plainly, whatever and wherever he was now, Tom had been one of Bill’s men. Were Dick and Sandy in his hands? Had they left the island? These and other questions came thronging to Pat’s

mind, but he had no further time for thinking. Bill began to speak again.

"Now see here. We're going to get Stephens to-night. Get him, do you understand? No mistake about that. He got the message we faked up, and all we've got to do is to stop his car on the Rushforth Road. He'll have one man at most with him. Remember, they won't mind shooting. So don't wait. As soon as the car stops—and the way the road will be fixed it can't help stopping—let him have it. They'll need a new revenue officer to-morrow in this part of the world."

Bill paused and gave a low unpleasant laugh. Pat remembered with terror what his mother had said over the telephone. His father had gone out in his car on some business. Had he gone in answer to the faked message? Was he already driving to his death? Yet, even if he were, Pat could do nothing to save him.

"That's all right, Bill," said one of the other men. "Yes, they'll need a new officer: and I hope that he won't know his job so well, or that we can pay him to shut his eyes now and then. I don't waste any love on Jim Stephens. You know that, Bill. But I'm all against this shooting game. If we kill Stephens, there'll be an awful stink. Even if they don't nab us, our game will be up. Things will be stricter than ever."

A murmur of assent came from two other men. Bill turned on them like a wild animal.

"Oh," he snarled, throwing away his cigar. "I knew how it would be. You're a chicken-hearted lot

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of washouts. Ready for anything till the time comes to do it, and then cold feet. A girls' boarding-school is where you should be. No guts—that's what is wrong with you."

"Go easy, Bill," said the man who had spoken before. "That kind of talk won't get you anywhere here. Sometimes you've got more guts than sense."

He looked at Bill's well-filled waistcoat as he spoke and gave an impudent laugh.

For a moment Bill's fury kept him from uttering a word. He stared at the rebel and then looked defiantly round the circle. At last the floodgates of profanity were opened.

Finally there was a lull in the storm. The man against whom it had been directed had taken the outburst very calmly.

"You've been drinking too much, Bill," he remarked quietly. "It always makes you hot and nasty. You'll explode some day. Now you remember one thing: you're the boss, but you can't play the bully here. We're not going to kill Jim just because you say so."

Bill glared in silence. At last he muttered sulkily:

"Well, if you don't want to get rid of Stephens in the best way, what do you want to do?"

"Nab him and keep him," answered the other. "Don't let him go till he promises to chuck his job and not to mention us. If he promises, Jim Stephens will do it."

Bill grunted contemptuously.

"Sort of gentleman's agreement, eh? Everything

straight and above board. Quite a sportsman you are. All right, if that's what you poor fools want, have it your own way. But whatever you're going to do, hurry up, or it'll be too late to do anything."

Bill once more lapsed into sullen silence.

"No need for any scrapping, Bill," said Bob, who had not spoken since Pat had been listening. "I've got a scheme will suit you all."

"Oh, you have, have you?" sneered Bill. "Well, spit it out."

"Leave Jim Stephens alone; we don't need to bother about him."

All the others stared at Bob.

"You know, Bill," went on Bob, "Hank's been telling me about a kid you shot at the island."

"Yes, what about him? What's that got to do with this business?"

"You didn't hit him."

"What blinking difference does it make whether we hit him or not?" asked Bill, furious with impatience.

"He's the same kid that got Hank thrown off the *Irene*," continued Bob, without paying the least attention to Bill's rage.

Bill's temper had not been sweetened by drink. His leadership had been challenged, and now here was Bob—so it seemed to him—trying to madden him by talking nonsense.

"Has anybody here got any sense? Make that fool Bob shut up, and let's get down to business."

"He said his name was Pat Post," went on Bob at

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the same pace. He was no more troubled by Bill's interruptions than a tank is by a flimsy wooden fence.

Bill rose to his feet a shade unsteadily and came lurching towards Bob. Just as he reached him, Bob looked up and remarked:

"But his real name is Pat Stephens."

Bill halted.

"What! Jim's kid?" he said in astonishment.

Bob nodded.

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

Bill sat down. A moment's silence followed, and then excited, confused talk.

"What's your plan?" asked Bill at last.

"Kidnap the youngster and make Jim toe the mark; make him give up his job, and pay through the nose too. He'll do it all right; it's his only kid."

For a few moments Bill said nothing.

"By gosh," he declared, "you're right. You've got the kid all safe, have you?"

Bob laughed.

"Sure we've got him. Hank tied him up an hour ago when we left the cottage."

"We'll take him on board to-night," said Bill, "Jim will soon knock under."

"Where'll you keep the boy?" asked one of the men.

"Oh, some out-of-the-way place," said Bill rather vaguely. "Somewhere back of beyond."

At first Pat had listened to the talk about himself



with a certain pride. He was pleased to think that he had been such a nuisance to these fellows. But, when he heard of the plot to carry him off, he realized that the sooner he slipped away the better. He could now help his father only by escaping. There were clear signs that the meeting was over and that in a few moments the men would be on the move. The longer he stayed where he was, the more he increased the danger of capture.

At once he began to back away on hands and knees from the little door. The moon was bright, but it did not light the space of ground on which he was crawling. Upon it fell the dark shadow of the brick wall. Even the faint gleam of the lantern was gone now. One of the men had moved it. The whole place around Pat was black as a coal cellar.

Pat had just turned round and was about to rise to his feet when he suddenly grew rigid with suspense. He could see nothing; nor was he certain that he had heard anything, but somehow he felt sure that a few feet from him something or somebody was moving in the darkness. Was it a sentry whom Bill had posted? As a boy scout Pat had played the game of night-scouting by day, and had often won marks for his patrol by his quickness. But now it was not a question of gaining marks in a contest—it was a question of his own safety and of his father's good name. For a few seconds Pat made no motion whatever. Then all at once he heard a soft movement and the sound of a quickly taken breath. An animal or a person was near

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him. Stare as he would, however, Pat could not pierce the darkness.

Motionless on his hands and knees, with his senses painfully alert, Pat wondered what was best to do. If he did nothing, the danger, whatever it was, might disappear; but, on the other hand, he might find himself helplessly recaptured.

Pat's indecision was suddenly ended. Behind him he heard Bill's men moving about, and some of them, he thought probable, might come in his direction. He rose to his feet and started forward. Almost at the same instant he bumped into somebody. He struck out savagely, and in return received a blow in the chest. Down he went, and in his fall knocked over a pile of bricks.

"What's that?" shouted a voice.

Before Pat could get to his feet and run for it, there was a rush towards him, and a flashlight was turned upon him. The next moment he was seized, and half a dozen men were about him.

He was dragged round the end of the wall behind which he had been listening and into the place where the men had been talking.

"Why, it's the brat himself," said Hank, as the light of the lantern fell on Pat's face.

"How in thunder did you get here?" asked Bob.

"In your car," answered Pat. "It's back up the road a bit. I ran out of gas. But it's a nice car and did thirty-five easily on some parts of the road. I hope——"

"Shut up," broke in Bill harshly. "Who cares what you hope?"

Pat had gone on talking as long as he was allowed, not because he wished to explain how he had reached the brick-yard, but because he wished to play for time. At any moment his father might arrive, and every second might count. His ears were eagerly listening for the sound of a car or of footsteps.

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded Pat with as defiant an air as he could contrive.

"Oh, nothing much," answered Bill, with a chuckle. "Just keep you with us a while. We did think of having your old man, but you'll do very nicely."

"What good's this going to do you?" asked Pat.

Before Bill could answer, there came through the night air the hum of a car, faint but clear.

"Come on," said Bill hastily. "Enough gabbing. That car's coming this way. Look after the kid. Right down to the *Dart*."

Two men immediately grabbed Pat, and, forcing him along in front of them, broke into a trot.

"You shout, or play any tricks," said one of the men in Pat's ear, "and you'll get what you missed on the island."

Pat felt the end of a revolver poked into his ribs.

As they reached the old half-ruined wharf, the noise of the car seemed very close. Then all at once it ceased. The car had stopped. Pat was hustled over the shaking boards, and saw the black water gleaming below. Twice he all but fell through.

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“Hurry up!” said Bill. “Just in time! That motor has stopped at the yard.”

Almost before he was aware of what was happening Pat found himself on board the bootleggers' yacht. For a moment there was hurrying to and fro. Then the engine started, and the yacht drew out from the wharf. As it did so, Pat heard the sound of voices, and the rush of men's feet. One of the voices, he was all but certain, belonged to his father. Pat was on the verge of shouting, when once more he felt the revolver barrel thrust hard against his side.

“Hold your tongue unless you want a hole blown in you,” said Hank's voice. “The luck's with us this trip.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### Dick redeems Himself

When Dick crept up to Sandy and Tom he was very flustered.

"Sandy," he whispered.

"Oh, Dick, is that you?" said Sandy, turning round sharply.

"Yes, I had a mighty close shave," said Dick. "One of those fellows and I had a rough and tumble, and I just managed to break away as the rest came to help him. But it doesn't matter. Pat's free. I don't know where he is, but he's free; and his father'll be here any minute."

"I know where Pat is."

"Where?"

"He was taken off a minute ago to the *Dart*. It was Pat you wrestled with."

Poor Dick could at first say nothing.

"Pat?" he stammered at last. "But how—why—I mean, where——?"

"I don't understand the business," said Sandy, "but here's what I saw."

He told Dick quickly what he had seen and heard in the last few minutes.

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"Then," murmured Dick in an unsteady voice, "that means Pat was free before I blundered into him. It was my fault—all my fault—he was caught again."

"You couldn't help it, old chap," said Sandy, touching him gently on the shoulder.

Their talk was suddenly cut short by the sound of the yacht's engine, and almost at the same instant a noise at their backs made them jump and whirl around. They found themselves staring into a powerful flashlight.

"Hello, Dick; hello, Sandy," said a quiet voice. "Where's Pat?"

A man stepped up to them and held out his hand. He was about six feet two, straight and slim, with a keen brown face. It was Pat's father; just behind him stood half a dozen men.

"Oh, sir, they've just got him."

"Who've got him?"

"Bill and his gang."

"Where are they?"

"At the wharf."

Instantly Stephens and his men were off at full speed towards the river. Sandy and Dick raced along with them.

But it was no good. The yacht was well under way when they reached the wharf.

"Get the car," said the revenue officer to one of his men.

"Yes, sir," and the man was off on the double.

All at once out of the shadows slouched the lanky figure of Tom.

"Who's this?" said Stephens to the boys.

"This is Tom, sir."

"And who is Tom?"

They gave a hasty explanation.

"Well, Tom," said Stephens rather grimly, when they had finished. "You've switched to the right side just in time."

"I guess perhaps you're right," said Tom. "I never did like Bill very much, and besides he owes me money. The thing of it is——"

What Tom intended to say was never known, for at that moment a car honked.

"Look sharp," said Pat's father. "This way."

They all ran to the car and bundled in. Stephens and Sandy went in front beside the driver.

"We've got to reach the mouth of the river in time to see which way she goes," said Stephens in a quiet voice to the man at the wheel. "So don't mind the bumps, Mac."

Mac grinned, and the great car jumped forward. Sandy, squashed in between Stephens and Mac, could feel the former's arm tight round him; and Sandy knew that the only thought in the father's mind was for Pat's safety. The road ran alongside the river, which, gleaming like silver in the moonlight, flashed swiftly past them. The speed would have been dizzy enough on the smoothest pavement; on this rough, narrow, twisting road it was terrific. If Sandy could have thought of anything besides Pat, he would have been filled with blind panic. But, as it was, the wild leaping

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and rocking gave him only a sense of exultation. Who could escape them? The sharp night air rushed past. the excitement of the chase went to Sandy's head like wine. Then, with extraordinary suddenness, the lake lay stretched before them, and the car stopped with a jerk.

Almost before the wheels had ceased turning, Stephens and Sandy were out.

"Good old moonlight, eh?" said the revenue officer. "Look."

Sandy and Dick looked the way Stephens pointed. The slim black shape of the *Dart* showed sharply against the moonlit water. She was headed north.

"She can go a good clip," said Stephens, "but with luck we ought to get her."

He blew three long blasts on a whistle. Almost immediately came an answer from somewhere to their left. Out of the dark shadows under the far bank of the river glided a large launch. When a stone's throw from them she stopped. A boat was lowered and rowed ashore. Stephens talked quietly with the oarsman for a moment; then turned to Mac.

"Take the car back to Bloxton. Wire to points up the coast about the yacht. Tell them to hold her if she calls in. Phil will go with you. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The rowboat had to make two trips, but in ten minutes everybody except Mac and Phil was on board. The launch moved out into the lake, and the chase began.



Sandy and Dick stood in the bow, their eyes fixed on the yacht ahead. At first they were ready to believe that they were gaining, but after an hour they regretfully admitted to themselves that there was as much water as ever between themselves and Pat.

Presently the moonlight, which made the *Dart* just visible, began to fail them. The sky grew overcast, and they could only trust that Bill was holding to the same course.

"You boys had better turn in," said Stephens. "You may need to be on your toes to-morrow. Good-night."

It was a long night for Dick. Tired out though he was, he could not sleep. Over and over again he kept telling himself that but for his clumsiness Pat would now be safe and free. He wondered what the next day would bring and shrank from facing some of the possibilities. When daybreak came he looked tired and haggard.

The clouds were low and heavy, and all around there was nothing to be seen but grey tumbling water. The wind was dead against them.

About noon the clouds suddenly broke. A strip of blue sky appeared and swiftly widened. In half an hour they were under an almost cloudless sky and driving their way over sparkling waves. Stephens was busy with the glasses, but for a long time with no success.

All at once Dick and Sandy saw him grow tense. The boys could see nothing with the naked eye, and

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they waited in suspense for Stephens to speak. At last he lowered the glasses.

"That's Cape Hurd ahead, and she's just turned it."

When they, shortly afterwards, reached Cape Hurd and swung eastward into the Georgian Bay the *Dart* was no longer to be seen. The afternoon grew into evening without their quarry being sighted again.

They speculated as to Bill's plans. They had to have some theory to work on, for the Georgian Bay is a large place, and its long intricate shore line is fringed with thirty thousand islands. They could not hope to explore every channel and inlet. Stephens believed that Bill was seeking the shelter of the islands and that he would wish to get among them as soon as possible. They, therefore, decided to follow what they thought was probably Bill's route and to cross the bay directly to Parry Sound.

Late that night they slipped into the harbour at Parry Sound, and anchored. Early next morning Stephens went ashore to make inquiries. He returned in half an hour.

"Any luck, sir?" asked Dick eagerly.

Stephens shook his head.

"No. They've seen and heard nothing of the *Dart*. We'll go up along the coast and trust to luck that we'll pick up a clue."

The boys looked at one another rather glumly. Suddenly Sandy felt a hand grip his shoulder.

"By the living Jingo, there she is!" cried Tom, who had been standing silently a few feet away.

From behind the tip of an island about a quarter of a mile away glided the grey yacht, heading straight in for Parry Sound. Stephens gave one or two orders in a quiet voice.

In silence they watched the *Dart* draw near. The search which they had begun to feel was about hopeless had suddenly ended. Their amazing luck seemed too good to be true. When not more than a hundred yards off she stopped and anchored. At once Stephens ordered a boat to be lowered. One of the men got in and took the oars.

"Both you boys had better come," said the revenue officer.

As they came close to the *Dart* two or three men looked down at them. One of them Sandy remembered having seen at the brick-yard. It was not Bill. A moment later they were along side.

"Hello! What do you want?" asked one of the men on deck.

"I wish to come on board," answered Stephens.

The man hesitated a second. The sight of Stephens' uniform appeared to decide him.

"All right," he answered rather sulkily.

A ladder was lowered. Stephens and the two boys climbed up, and found themselves faced by seven men.

"Well, what is it?" asked one of them.

"I place you all under arrest."

"You do, do you?" retorted the man, with a laugh.  
'What for?'

"For kidnapping my son, Pat Stephens."

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"What do you think this is? A home for lost kids? We don't know where your youngster is. He's not here."

"Is William Blatz the owner of this yacht?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"I dunno. Do you want to search the place?"

"Yes."

The three of them left no corner unvisited. They ransacked every possible hiding-place and found nothing. Not a trace of Bill or Pat. Just as they finished, Sandy remembered that at the brick-yard he had counted nine men, and that on the *Dart* now there were only seven.

"There is a man missing besides Bill," he said to Stephens.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; there were nine at the yard. He's the one they call Hank."

"All right."

Again they stepped out on deck.

"Well, find anything? Perhaps you'll mind your business now that you see we haven't got your kid?"

"No, he's not here," said Stephens slowly, "but that doesn't help you much. You're under arrest all the same. Come on, the game's up. We know all about it—about the island, about your shooting at the boy there, about your meeting last night at the brick-yard. Both these boys were there. We have Tom on the launch, and he has told us most things. Whether

you talk or not, it's jail for the lot of you, but you might shorten your sentence. I give you five minutes. If you don't want to tell us about Bill and Hank, then you can take your chance."

The seven men withdrew to the stern. Stephens signalled to the launch, which at once came alongside. Sandy was standing beside Stephens; Dick had wandered off somewhere.

"Time's up," called Stephens, putting his watch away.

The men came forward—one of them slightly in advance of the others.

"What have you got to say?" asked Pat's father.

"Nothing. Your kid's not here and never was here; and what's more——"

His speech was suddenly cut short. Dick was racing up to Stephens. In his hand he waved a small black-covered notebook.

"Look!" he called out, "It's Pat's diary."

Stephens quickly took the book and glanced through it.

"Good boy!" he said to Dick. "That's enough to prove he was here. Unfortunately there's nothing in it to help us."

He turned to the men.

"Are you going to talk now or not?"

For a moment they whispered together.

"We'll tell you what we know," said the spokesman rather sheepishly. "It ain't much after all. We left Bill, Hank, and the kid about ten miles up from here

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in a motor rowboat. They headed up the coast."

"Where to?"

"We don't know."

"What supplies did they take?"

"Enough for a couple of weeks, I guess."

"And where were you going?"

"Bloxton."

"Back to the old game?"

The man nodded.

"Is that all you know?"

"Yes."

"All right. I hope for your sake you're telling the truth. Raise your anchor and follow the launch."

In response to a signal the launch headed in for Parry Sound; the *Dart* followed. In less than an hour the seven men were under lock and key, and the revenue cutter was off up the coast, dodging in and out among the islands.

"Come into the cabin," said Stephens to the boys and Tom.

"Now, look here," he said, when they were seated, "you overheard the talk in the brick-yard?"

Tom and Sandy nodded.

"I want you to try and remember exactly what Bill said about the kidnapping plan—his exact words. You first, Sandy."

"Bill didn't suggest the scheme," said Sandy. "It was another fellow. I don't understand, but he seemed to have had Pat prisoner somewhere, and he thought he still had him."

"Yes, and what did Bill say?"

"Bill jumped at the scheme, and said he'd keep Pat stowed away till you toed the mark."

"Didn't he say anything about where he'd keep him?"

Sandy thought for a moment.

"He didn't mention any place. I'm sure of that. I think he said something about keeping him at the back of beyond."

"The back of beyond," repeated Stephens. "That sounds rather vague."

All at once Tom began to stammer with excitement.

"You see, I'd forgotten all about it, but years ago Bill came up here on a hunting trip. He was after moose. And he took me along—I forget what year it was, but it was just after I got to know him—well, he took me along as cook. He went to an island of his in the Bay; and the name of the island—I know because it was painted in great white letters on the rock—the name of the island was The Back of Beyond."

## CHAPTER XX

### The Back of Beyond

"Where is the island, Tom?" asked Stephens. "You must remember all you can."

For a while Tom was silent, and sat wrinkling his forehead. At last he began to speak.

"We went by train to as near the place as we could get. I don't remember the name of the station we got off at, but it was past this place—I mean past Parry Sound—an hour or two past it. Well, we got off at a little station, and a launch met us. It was awful cold, I remember. You see it was late in September. We had a flurry of snow on the way."

"Yes, but that doesn't matter, Tom," broke in Sandy impatiently. "Where did the launch take you?"

"To a hotel. We had a meal there, not a very good one; and oh yes, I remember now, we slept there that night. Next morning the same launch took us farther up the coast. We went away out into the open. Some ugly-looking reefs there were too, with lots of white water on them."

"How far did you go?" asked Stephens.

"About an hour or so," answered Tom. "I guess it was less than an hour. Then we turned in from the



open. We went down a long bay, and then we came to the island. There was a house on it, and right across the face of a big rock was painted The Back of Beyond. The rock was at the end of the island near the open."

"All right, Tom. That'll do for just now," said Stephens.

Tom went out and left the two boys in the cabin.

"Does either of you boys know the Georgian Bay, the part Tom was talking about?" asked Stephens.

Dick shook his head.

"I've been up there once on a canoe trip," answered Sandy.

"Well, Tom and Bill seem to have gone about forty or fifty miles past Parry Sound on the train. That took them fairly near some hotel; and the hotel's about an hour from The Back of Beyond. Now let's see what you remember."

He led Sandy over to the wall, where hung a large-scale map of Lake Huron and the Georgian Bay.

"If Tom's memory of things is more or less straight, the hotel must be somewhere round there," said Stephens, drawing a circle on the map with his finger. "What hotels are there in that part?"

Sandy pondered a moment.

"One here," he said, "on this big island; a small one here; and a third on this island near the open. Those are all, I think."

"They're not far apart," said Stephens; "we'll take a look at them all. Nothing more we can do just now."

Sandy and Dick walked up and down the deck for

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an hour, talking of Pat and the chances which lay ahead of them. About noon Stephens joined them.

"We must be getting near the small hotel now," he said.

"Yes," answered Sandy, "we are. Straight ahead there, and then about half a mile to the left."

When they were almost at the place, Stephens called Tom.

"Does this look like the place where you and Bill slept?" he asked.

Tom glanced ahead at the hotel and around at the islands.

"No," he said positively. "That's not it. It was a bigger building."

"All right. We'll try the second—the one on the big island."

Half an hour's cruise brought them to it—a large log building set back among pine trees.

"No," said Tom again. "I never saw that place before."

The third and last hotel was only three or four miles away. As they drew near it, Tom seemed to grow excited and fidgety. Finally, as they rounded the end of an island, a lighthouse on a rocky point came into view.

"I remember that," said Tom, "and there's the hotel."

It was wholly different from the other two places—a great unpainted barn-like building, perched on bare grey rocks.

"The place had a funny name. It began with Talk or something like that. No, it was Chat."

"Chateau," suggested Sandy.

"Yes. Chat-o Huron."

"I'm going ashore for a few minutes," said Stephens.

They drew into the wharf, and Stephens walked up to the hotel. He was away about a quarter of an hour.

"The proprietor doesn't know much about the places round here," he said, as he stepped on board. "It's his first summer in this part. But the chap who runs the hotel launch knows more about things. The Back of Beyond is only about six miles away. He showed it to me on a map. And what's more—this morning about two hours ago he passed a rowboat with two men and a boy in it, a rowboat driven by a motor. And now it's time for a meal. We'll have it on that island over there."

"But aren't you going on, sir?" asked Dick, with a keen note of disappointment in his voice.

"I think," answered Stephens, "we might give Bill a chance to get settled before calling on him. We'll drop in later."

Dick and Sandy looked at him in a puzzled way.

"What I mean," said Stephens, "is that the less attention we attract the better. If Bill sees us coming he's quite capable of shooting Pat or anybody else. We'll go up quietly at dusk."

Sandy and Dick were too excited to eat much. They strolled about the island on which they had landed,

looked across a stretch of open water and reefs to where the Back of Beyond lay, and thought of Pat. Never had they known an afternoon pass so slowly. At last after a light evening meal Stephens looked at his watch.

"Soon be moving now," he said.

He looked across towards the hotel. A moment later he exclaimed:

"There she is."

A canoe was approaching the island. In it was an Indian. He landed, walked up to Stephens, and grinned.

"Put your canoe on board, and we'll start," said Stephens.

They headed straight out to the open. The Indian was at the wheel. Stephens at last satisfied the boys' curiosity.

"He's the man who runs the hotel launch, and he knows the channels."

When they were far enough out to be clear of the reefs, they moved along parallel with the shore and its fringe of islands. After half an hour or so the Indian twirled the wheel, and they headed in. In and out among the islands they went, until the steersman said to Stephens:

"One mile now."

"Anchor under that island," said Stephens, pointing.

The canoe was lowered. The Indian took his place in the stern, Stephens in the bow.

"Like to come, Dick?" he asked.

Dick's eyes shone with eagerness; he did not need to say anything.

The canoe moved silently along the narrow channels, and nobody spoke. After about a quarter of an hour they came out on a more open stretch, at the far end of which lay an island somewhat larger than those they had been passing.

"That's it," said the Indian.

Stephens picked up his glasses and looked at the island. Presently he passed them to Dick.

"Have a look," he said quietly, "and don't make a noise."

The warning was not unnecessary. Dick would have liked to shout. The glasses had shown him a line of great white letters at the near end of the island, and the letters spelled "The Back of Beyond".

"We'll paddle round the place, and see what it looks like," said Stephens to the Indian. "Keep well out."

The Indian made no comment, and the canoe again moved on. From time to time Stephens was busy with the glasses. A house stood about the middle of the island, and on one side was a boat-house built out over the water, so that when the doors were open a boat could run straight in. At present the doors were closed. The only sign of life was a thin wisp of smoke rising from the house.

"Back to the launch," said Stephens, when they had finished circling the island. "Nothing more to do here just now."

As soon as they were once more on board, Stephens called all the men together. All told, there were ten persons—Stephens, five of his men, Tom, Sandy, Dick, and the Indian.

“We’ve found the island,” said Stephens, “and there’s somebody on it. That’s all we know yet. The plan is this. About midnight we’ll take the two rowboats and the canoe. We’ll land at the same time on both sides of the island—the rowboats at the boat-house, the canoe at the other side—surround the house and then rush the place. Remember, we’ve got to approach the house quietly and then act quickly. Here is the position of things.”

Stephens took a large sheet of paper, and they all gathered round the table. He drew a map of the island, marking the house and the boat-house.

“Do you all understand?” he asked. “All right.”

They filed out of the cabin and walked about the deck quietly talking. Sandy and Dick could settle to nothing. The question of what the next few hours would bring filled their thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. Would Pat be safely in the launch with them before morning?

Gradually the last traces of light in the west faded away. Islands and trees became dark masses, and then melted into the surrounding blackness. Heavy banks of clouds covered the sky. The boats would certainly not be seen on their way to the island. The oars and rowlocks had been muffled, and the crews had been

arranged. The engineer of the launch and the Indian were to stay on board. Sandy and Dick were to go with Stephens in the canoe.

Silently the boats and the canoe were lowered and shoved off. The latter was to lead and the boats to follow close. The three little craft crept through the darkness. Not a word was spoken.

When about two hundred yards from the island Stephens stopped paddling, and the rowboats came alongside. He pointed to a gleam of light.

"That light is in the house," he whispered. "Now I'll take you to the boat-house. After I leave you there, allow us ten minutes to get round to the other side. Then land, surround the house, and wait for my signal."

They stole on for a few moments more, and then Stephens again stopped paddling. Once more the rowboats came alongside. Stephens whispered a word to each, and they slid off in the darkness towards the boat-house. Stephens glanced at the luminous dial of his watch and resumed paddling.

On a dark windless night a canoe always appears to travel swiftly. It seemed to Sandy and Dick that they must have travelled a couple of miles instead of a few hundred yards when at last Stephens stopped. There was just enough light for the boys to see that they were gliding into shore. Dick leaned out and with his hand kept the bow from grating on the rocks.

"Five minutes to wait," whispered Stephens.

If the suspense had been great before, it was doubled

now. Sandy and Dick agreed afterwards that it was the longest five minutes of their lives.

"Now," said Stephens quietly.

They stepped out and gingerly lifted the canoe from the water. Stephens took the lead, and the three of them started to crawl on hands and knees up a rocky slope. After going some twenty yards they reached level ground and stood up. Almost directly on their left hand was the house—a dark mass except for the light which shone through one window. They could see two men at a table playing cards. As they stood there, a man tiptoed noiselessly up to Stephens.

"All ready?" asked Stephens in a whisper.

"Two minutes more. Tom's gone astray somewhere."

"I'll signal in two minutes. We'll go then, whether he's there or not," answered Stephens.

The man vanished as quietly as he had come. Dick and Sandy wondered whether Tom had turned traitor at the last minute or whether he was merely a coward.

Barely had these thoughts flashed through their minds when the silence was broken by a great crash. It seemed to come from the neighbourhood of the boat-house. Was it a noise made by Tom to warn Hank and Bill? Whatever it was, it meant that they must act at once.

Instantly Stephens blew his whistle, and rushed towards the door of the house, Dick and Sandy at his heels. The light had immediately been extinguished, and there was a noise of voices and hasty movements.



Stephens tore the door open and dashed into the darkness. Sandy and Dick were directly behind him. There was an exclamation and the thud of a body on the floor. The next thing they knew was that a man had charged into them and that they were wrestling with him. A violent jab in the stomach sent Sandy sprawling with his wind knocked out, and a second later Dick went down, dazed by a blow on the head. The man was free. But before he could reach the door Stephens, once more on his feet, had turned the flashlight on him. A revolver shot rang out, and Hank, wounded in the leg, staggered back against the wall. As he did so, he jerked out his revolver. But even as he raised it, a cushion came flying through the air and knocked it aside. Before Hank could aim again, Stephens and Sandy had him down. By now the room seemed full of men. Pat rushed up to his father.

"Where's Bill?" called Stephens sharply. "This is the other fellow."

In an instant flashlights had explored every corner of the little house. Bill was not there.

"To the boat-house," shouted Stephens.

Sandy and Dick rushed out of the door. There was a noise at the water's edge, the chug-chug of a motor-boat. At breakneck speed they tumbled down the rough path. They reached the boat-house at the same moment as two of Stephens' men. One of them held a flashlight. By its aid they saw Bill in a motor-rowboat twenty feet from shore. Was he about to slip through

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their hands after all? In a few moments he would be lost in the darkness.

One of the men swiftly drew and cocked his revolver. But he did not shoot, for suddenly a voice beside them said:

“Don’t shoot. He won’t go far. Look.”

It was Tom. And now they saw that Bill had begun to bail in frantic haste, but in spite of his efforts the boat rapidly filled and sank. In a minute he was floundering in the water.

He was soon fished out, a wretched bedraggled figure, and immediately handcuffed.

“You see,” said Tom slowly, “the thing of it is I didn’t go up to the house with the rest, for I sort of thought Bill might make a run for the boat. I found a hatchet in the boat-house and bashed in the boat a little bit. Perhaps you heard the noise. Bill’s a pretty heavy fellow, you know, and, when he jumped in, the hole went below the water.”

Bill said not a word, but he gave Tom one look of concentrated fury. The boys had never before seen a face so marked with venomous hatred. Though Bill was a helpless prisoner, his look half terrified Tom.

“You shouldn’t look at me that way, Bill,” he stammered. “You know you didn’t treat me very square, and these boys done me a good turn, and, anyway, you owe me money——”

He was still speaking when Sandy and Dick turned and raced back to the house. As they burst in they saw Pat standing beside his father.

"Oh, Pat, are you all right?"

"Sure I'm all right," answered Pat with a happy grin. "It was me threw the cushion at Hank."

An hour later Stephens and the three boys were in the cabin of the launch.

"We started out for the Bay," said Sandy, "and here we are—that is, all except the poor old *Scud*."

"I think," said Stephens, with a smile, "that the reward for rounding up Bill and his gang might be a new *Scud*. What do you say?"



